

THE BERLIN CONFERENCE SERIES

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Tracing a Nation from the Berlin Conference to the Present

PART ONE OF FIVE

Pre-Colonial Societies and French Conquest

Before 1884 – 1910

Artifact 1: Narrative

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Series Framework: Berlin Conference Project

PREFACE TO THE BERLIN CONFERENCE SERIES

About This Study

This study is the product of a collaborative research and writing process. The human researcher provided the analytical framework, project direction, historical insight, and quality control. Claude (Anthropic's AI assistant) conducted exhaustive research, synthesized historical sources, performed quantitative analysis, and composed the narrative and analytical essays. This collaboration combines human expertise in historical interpretation with AI capabilities in systematic research and comprehensive writing.

The Berlin Conference Series: Project Overview

Between November 15, 1884, and February 26, 1885, fourteen European powers and the United States convened in Berlin to divide the African continent among themselves. Not a single African representative was present. The Berlin Conference established the legal and political framework—particularly the "effective occupation" doctrine—that enabled European powers to claim sovereignty over African territories through minimal administrative presence and military force.

The Berlin Conference Series documents how this colonial partition engineered African states to facilitate European extraction of wealth and resources, and traces how this colonial engineering directly shapes contemporary African nations. Each country study in this series follows the same analytical structure, enabling systematic comparison across the continent.

Series Objective

This series demonstrates that contemporary African challenges—political instability, ethnic conflicts, economic underdevelopment, border disputes—are not products of African culture, geography, or inherent limitations. They are the direct, traceable consequences of colonial engineering implemented following the Berlin Conference framework.

By documenting the mechanisms of colonial extraction, the violence of conquest, the deliberate underdevelopment through colonial policy, and the persistence of colonial structures into the post-independence era, this series provides empirical evidence for understanding how colonialism created lasting inequality.

Analytical Framework

Each country study consists of five parts, each containing two artifacts—one narrative and one quantitative framework analysis—for a total of ten artifacts per country:

Part 1: Pre-Colonial Baseline and Conquest (Before 1884 – ~1910) establishes what existed before European colonization in terms of political systems, economies, and populations, then documents how the Berlin Conference legal framework enabled French territorial claims and how conquest was executed through violence.

Part 2: Colonial Consolidation and Peak Extraction (1900–1940) details the concessionnaire system that was unique to French Equatorial Africa, the forced labor programs, the rubber and cotton extraction regimes, and the mass violence used to enforce them.

Part 3: Colonial Government Engineering (1900–1958) examines how France structured the administration of Oubangui-Chari—favoring river and southern peoples as administrative auxiliaries while designating interior peoples as labor reserves—and how this created ethnic hierarchies whose geography maps almost precisely onto contemporary conflict lines.

Part 4: Independence and the First Decades (1958–1993) traces the death of Barthélemy Boganda, the only credible nationalist leader, one year before independence; the structural weakness of the Dacko government; Jean-Bédél Bokassa's thirteen-year reign of terror and France's role in sustaining and then removing him; and the revolving governments of the 1980s and 1990s.

Part 5: Contemporary Nation—Permanent Crisis (1993–Present) quantifies the consequences: the 2013 state collapse, the Séléka-Anti-Balaka civil war, the Wagner Group's arrival as resource-extraction mercenaries, and the CAR's position at 188th of 191 countries on the Human Development Index—all traced directly to colonial engineering.

Methodological Principles

Quantification: Every claim is supported by data where possible. Population figures, economic values, mortality rates, and resource flows are calculated and presented in both historical currency and current equivalents for comparison. Where precision is impossible, ranges are provided with explanation.

Primary Sources: Colonial government records, census data, contemporary accounts, and participant testimonies are prioritized over secondary interpretations. The record for Oubangui-Chari is less complete than for larger, more heavily documented colonies; this study notes where evidence is thin and proceeds with appropriate caution.

African-Centered Perspective: While documenting European actions, the focus remains on African experiences—what Africans endured, what was taken from them, how they resisted, and how they were affected. The pre-colonial societies documented in Part 1 are presented as the baseline against which colonial destruction is measured.

Comparative Analysis: Each study compares the country to other African nations, to its former colonial power, and where applicable to countries that were never colonized, demonstrating the specific impact of colonial policies on long-term development outcomes.

Tracing Continuities: The analysis explicitly connects colonial-era policies and structures to contemporary challenges, showing direct causal chains across decades and generations. The CAR is a particularly clear case: the concession system's destruction of productive capacity, the north-south administrative divide, and the extraction-over-development logic of French rule all map with unusual clarity onto contemporary poverty and conflict.

Scope and Limitations

Each country study is comprehensive but not exhaustive. The historical record for Oubangui-Chari is sparser than for wealthier or more strategically important colonies; French colonial administrators devoted more documentation to extraction accounts than to African social life. This study draws on French colonial archives, the published accounts of witnesses such as André Gide (who documented atrocities in 1926–27), academic histories by historians including Dennis Cordell, Thomas O'Toole, and Tamara Giles-Vernick, and contemporary data from international organizations.

Where data is uncertain, ranges are provided and sources noted. The study focuses on economic and political structures rather than cultural or social history, though these are addressed where relevant to understanding extraction mechanisms and colonial engineering.

How to Read This Study

This study is designed to be both standalone and part of the larger series. The Berlin Conference framework explanation is included to ensure readers understand the legal and political context that enabled colonial conquest, even if reading only this country study.

Narratives (Artifact 1 of each part) tell the story in book-chapter format with specific scenes, named individuals, and concrete examples. Framework Analyses (Artifact 2 of each part) quantify the mechanisms described in narratives, providing data tables, calculations, and systematic comparisons.

Together, narrative and analysis provide both human-level understanding of what colonialism meant for individuals and communities, and structural understanding of how colonial systems functioned and persisted across generations.

The Berlin Conference Series documents how European powers, meeting in Berlin in 1884–85, engineered the systematic extraction of African wealth and the deliberate underdevelopment of African nations—and how that

***engineering shapes Africa today, 140 years later. This is not
ancient history. This is the documented foundation of
contemporary inequality.***

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Part 1, Artifact 1: Narrative

The World That Was Taken: Pre-Colonial Societies and the French Conquest

Before 1884 – 1910

Prologue: The Debt That Was Not Theirs

Sometime in 1875, in the dry-season forest of the Oubangui basin south of what is now the city of Ndele, a Banda farming village was hit by slave raiders. The raiders came from the north, mounted on horses, armed with muskets purchased with the proceeds of previous raids. They were the agents of Zubayr Pasha, a Sudanese warlord who had built a commercial empire in the eastern Sahel by selling human beings to markets in Khartoum, Cairo, and across the Red Sea. The village had no warning. The men who tried to resist were shot. The women and children who could not run fast enough were bound with rope and marched north, beginning the long journey to places they had no names for.

This was not a new experience for the Banda. The slave trade had been working the Oubangui basin for decades, a slow hemorrhage of population from a region rich in people but remote from the defensive advantages—mountains, deserts, navigable escape routes—that had allowed other African societies to resist it more effectively. The raiding networks out of Darfur and Sudan had penetrated the region at least since the 1820s. By the 1870s, the entire northeastern quadrant of what would become Oubangui-Chari was organized around the slave trade: the Sultanate of Dar al-Kuti at Ndele, under the warlord Muhammad al-Senussi, operated as the primary collection point, receiving captives from interior raids and dispatching them north to Sudanese markets.

This detail matters for what follows—because when French columns arrived in the Oubangui basin in the late 1880s and early 1890s, they found a society already wounded by decades of external extraction. Some communities, exhausted and depleted, initially accepted French presence as a potential counterweight to the slave raiders who had devastated them. That hope would prove catastrophic. The French would not end extraction from the Oubangui basin. They would systematize it, giving it legal form and bureaucratic structure, extracting not people for sale but rubber and ivory and cotton

and labor—and killing, in the process, as many or more than the slave trade had killed in fifty years.

The story of the Central African Republic begins long before any European arrived. It begins with the people who built their lives in the forests and savannas of the Oubangui-Chari basin, the systems they created to govern themselves and trade with each other, and the catastrophe that arrived from Europe carrying the legal authorization of an international conference that had never asked their permission, spoken their language, or acknowledged their existence.

I. The People of the Oubangui-Chari Basin

Before the Berlin Conference partitioned it, the territory that France would name Oubangui-Chari was home to an estimated 1.5 to 2.5 million people, organized into dozens of distinct ethnic and linguistic communities. This was not a uniform region: its ecology ranged from dense equatorial forest in the south and southwest, through a vast central plateau of Guinea savanna, to the drier Sahel and semi-arid terrain in the north. Different peoples had developed distinct political, economic, and social systems adapted to these different environments, and the result was a mosaic of civilizations rather than a single undifferentiated population.

The Banda were the largest group, numbering perhaps 500,000 to 700,000 people in the central and eastern reaches of the territory. Semi-sedentary farmers and skilled iron workers, the Banda lived in dispersed settlements across the savanna, growing sorghum, millet, yams, and peanuts, and conducting regular trade with neighboring peoples. Their political organization was decentralized—the Banda had no centralized kingdom or paramount chief, but rather a system of clan-based authority in which village elders held local power and inter-clan disputes were resolved through negotiation and customary law. This decentralization made the Banda resilient in some ways—there was no single political center that could be captured to collapse the whole society—and vulnerable in others, particularly against the organized military forces of the slave raiders and, later, the French.

The Gbaya occupied the western portion of the territory, from the Lobaye River to the borders with what is now Cameroon, in an area of forest-savanna transition that allowed both farming and hunting. The Gbaya were remarkable hunters—skilled enough that their territory provided game to trading networks extending hundreds of miles in every direction—and also practiced shifting cultivation, moving their settlements periodically to allow soil recovery. Like the Banda, the Gbaya maintained a decentralized political structure organized around clan lineages. Their material culture included elaborate ceremonial practices, a sophisticated oral literary tradition, and iron-working skills that produced tools and weapons of high quality.

In the southeastern corner of the territory, the Zande—also known as the Azande—represented something quite different from the decentralized societies of the center and west. The Zande were organized under the Avungara dynasty, a ruling clan

that had expanded its power across an enormous territory through conquest and political incorporation over roughly the previous two centuries. The Zande kingdom was not a centralized state in the European sense, but it was far more elaborately organized than the Banda or Gbaya clan systems: it maintained a hierarchy of chiefs under the Avungara royal clan, conducted regular tribute extraction from subordinate peoples, organized military forces capable of sustained campaigns, and administered a justice system with recognized authority over wide areas. By the late nineteenth century, the Zande confederation controlled territory stretching across present-day southeastern CAR, northeastern DRC, and southwestern Sudan—a region larger than England.

The northern regions of the territory were home to a different configuration: the Sultanates that had emerged from or been drawn into the trans-Saharan slave trade economy. Dar al-Kuti, centered at Ndele in the northeast, was the most significant. Under Muhammad al-Senussi (often called simply Senoussi), who consolidated power in the 1890s, Dar al-Kuti operated simultaneously as a Muslim political state, a commercial hub, and a slave-raiding enterprise. Senoussi maintained an army equipped with firearms and a court that received French, British, and Sudanese envoys, playing the competing imperial powers against each other with considerable skill. The Sultanates of Bangassou and Rafai in the east, both ruled by Zande-derived dynasties that had converted to Islam and adopted Arab cultural forms, were smaller but similarly positioned at the intersection of the trans-Saharan and interior African trade networks.

Along the Oubangui River in the south and west, the Ngbandi and Ngbaka peoples maintained riparian communities organized around fishing, farming, and river trade. The Oubangui—which forms today's border with the Democratic Republic of Congo—was a major trade artery connecting the interior to the broader Congo basin. Canoes moved copper, iron, ivory, fish, and agricultural products up and down the river, creating commercial relationships that extended across the region. The river communities were accustomed to interaction with strangers: Arab and Swahili traders, Zande merchants, and itinerant craftsmen were familiar figures in the major river towns by the time the first French expedition appeared in 1887.

In the far north, Sara-speaking peoples occupied the region between the Chari River and what is now Chad. The Sara were farmers and herders who had developed sophisticated flood-recession agriculture along the rivers of the north, and their communities were among the largest and most densely settled in the entire territory. The Sara would later become the most systematically targeted group for French forced labor recruitment—their physical size and reputation for agricultural endurance made them preferred subjects of colonial conscription—a role assigned to them by French administrators that would shape their relationship to the state long after independence.

What united these diverse societies was not a common political identity—nothing equivalent to a "Central African" consciousness existed, nor should it have; these were distinct peoples with distinct languages, traditions, and political systems—but rather a set of overlapping trade and kinship networks that connected them to each other and to the broader world. Iron from the Banda workshops reached the river communities. Copper from the Congo basin arrived in exchange for forest products. The Sultanates in the northeast traded southward for cotton cloth, ivory, and human beings, and

northward for firearms and manufactured goods. This was not a region sealed off from the outside world: it was a region with its own forms of long-distance commerce, its own diplomatic relationships, its own history of conflict and alliance.

European accounts from the first expeditions consistently describe these societies in terms of their "primitiveness" or "savagery"—language designed to justify conquest rather than describe reality. What the evidence actually shows is more mundane and more damning of the colonial project: functioning communities, sophisticated adaptation to difficult environments, productive economies, and governance systems that, for all their limitations, were rooted in the consent and traditions of the people they governed. This is what France, acting under the legal authority granted by the Berlin Conference, would dismantle.

II. Political Economy Before Partition

The economic life of the Oubangui-Chari basin before colonization was organized around three complementary systems: subsistence agriculture and pastoralism, specialized craft production and exchange, and long-distance trade. These systems were not separate—they interpenetrated—but they served different functions and operated at different scales.

Subsistence agriculture formed the foundation. Across the savanna, the dominant staples were sorghum, millet, and yams, supplemented by peanuts, sesame, and a variety of legumes introduced through trade networks over centuries. The farming calendar was organized around the dual rainy seasons in the south and the single longer rains in the north and center, with agricultural work concentrated during and immediately after rainfall and other activities—hunting, craft production, long-distance trade—occupying the dry season. Women held primary responsibility for food crop cultivation in most communities, with men managing the heavier forest clearing and the specialized crops grown for trade. The division of labor was not merely economic but embedded in a system of social obligations and entitlements governing access to land, labor, and the products of labor.

Iron production was the most important craft industry, and it was widely understood as such—iron workers held elevated social status in many communities, and the knowledge of smelting and forging was carefully transmitted through lineage-based apprenticeship. Banda iron workers, in particular, produced tools and weapons traded across hundreds of miles of territory. The iron hoe was the instrument of agricultural production; the iron spear and knife were instruments of hunting and warfare. Control of iron production and access to iron goods was a form of economic and political power, and the communities that maintained smelting traditions were positioned at the center of regional exchange networks.

The ivory trade connected the interior of the Oubangui basin to markets far beyond its borders. Elephant populations in the Oubangui-Chari territory were substantial through the early nineteenth century, and ivory had been moving northward through the

Sudanese trade networks and southward through the Congo basin networks for generations. By the 1870s, however, increasing demand from European and American markets—for piano keys, billiard balls, and decorative goods—had driven intensive hunting that was already depleting elephant populations in the more accessible areas. The French would later claim credit for "protecting" wildlife in the region, while simultaneously creating the conditions that destroyed wildlife populations far more comprehensively than anything preceding colonial rule.

Trade with the coast was mediated through several competing networks. From the west, Hausa and Fulbe traders penetrated the savanna region with imported goods—cloth, salt, kola nuts, and later firearms and gunpowder—in exchange for ivory, beeswax, and eventually slaves. From the east, Sudanese Arab traders connected the Oubangui basin to the Nile trade axis. From the south, Swahili and later European-backed trading networks pushed up the Congo and Oubangui rivers. The communities of the Oubangui basin were not passive objects of this trade; they were active participants who used access to external goods to reinforce internal social hierarchies and to arm themselves against their neighbors.

The political economies of the Sultanates in the north deserve particular attention because they complicate the simple picture of "traditional" pre-colonial life that colonial administrators and subsequent historians have often imposed on the region. Dar al-Kuti under Senoussi was a sophisticated political economy organized around violent extraction—slave raiding—but it was also a redistributive state that used wealth extracted from the interior to maintain political loyalty among its administrative class, fund military capacity, and sustain an Islamic scholarly culture centered on the mosque at Ndele. Senoussi himself was literate in Arabic, corresponded with French and British colonial officials in formal diplomatic language, and understood his own position within the international politics of the late nineteenth century with considerable clarity. He was not a simple warlord but a state-builder who happened to be building his state at the precise moment a larger and more violent state-building project—French colonialism—was about to overwhelm him.

III. Berlin, 1884–85: A Continent Divided Without Consent

On November 15, 1884, Otto von Bismarck opened the Berlin Conference in the German capital with an address to the assembled delegates of fourteen European nations and the United States. Over the following three months, these fifteen powers negotiated the legal framework that would govern European colonization of Africa. No African delegate was present. No African government was consulted. No African people were asked whether they consented to the redistribution of their territories among foreign powers.

The central legal mechanism the conference created was the doctrine of "effective occupation," codified in Article 35 of the General Act of Berlin. Under this doctrine, a European power could establish a legally recognized claim to African territory if it demonstrated actual administrative or military presence and notified the other signatory powers of its claim. The doctrine was designed to resolve European

competition—to prevent wars between European states over African territories by establishing rules for how claims would be recognized. It was not designed with any reference to African interests, African sovereignty, or African governance. Existing African states—kingdoms, confederacies, sultanates, federations—had no standing under the Berlin framework. They could be claimed, conquered, and administered without any acknowledgment that they had once governed themselves.

For the territory that would become Oubangui-Chari, the Berlin Conference created an opening that France moved to exploit. France had already established a foothold in equatorial Africa through the explorations of Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza, who had signed a treaty with the Teke king Makoko on the northern bank of the Congo River in 1880, establishing what would become the French Congo. The Berlin Conference recognized French claims in the Congo basin and established the principle that France could expand northward from this base if it could demonstrate effective occupation.

The practical meaning of "effective occupation" for France was this: France needed to plant flags, establish posts, and sign treaties—regardless of whether those treaties were understood by the Africans who signed them, regardless of whether the posts were anything more than a few soldiers and a flag, and regardless of whether any administrative presence reached the vast interior. The Berlin Conference framework was less a standard of actual governance than a legal minimum designed to keep rival Europeans out while minimizing the investment required to keep Africans in.

In 1887, the first French expedition reached the Oubangui River, establishing a post at M'Poko at the junction of the M'Poko and Oubangui rivers. Two years later, in 1889, a more substantial post was established at what would become Bangui—named for the rapids on the Oubangui that marked the limit of river navigation from the south. France now had a flag planted in the interior. The claim to "effective occupation" could be registered in Berlin. The people living in the Oubangui basin had not been asked and would not be asked.

The borders that eventually enclosed Oubangui-Chari were drawn through a series of bilateral agreements between France and its colonial rivals that had nothing to do with the geography of African societies and everything to do with European diplomatic bargaining. In 1894, France and Britain negotiated a boundary that defined the northern limit of French territory south of Lake Chad and the Nile watershed—a line drawn across the map that cut through the territory of the Sara people without reference to their settlements or clan boundaries. In 1894, a Franco-German agreement fixed the western boundary through the Gbaya homeland, dividing Gbaya communities between Oubangui-Chari and German Cameroon, where they would remain divided across an international border for the next century. In 1905, France and Belgium finalized the Oubangui River as the boundary between French territory and the Belgian Congo, despite the fact that the river-bank communities on both sides were often more closely related to each other than to the interior peoples of either colonial state.

The Zande confederation in the southeast was divided three ways: its western regions went to France, its center to Belgium, its eastern territories to British-controlled Sudan. The Avungara ruling dynasty saw its domain fragmented across three colonial

administrations, each with different languages, legal systems, and economic policies, destroying the political unity that the dynasty had spent two centuries building.

In every case, the boundaries reflected European diplomatic convenience. Where rivers provided clear and easily surveyed lines, rivers were used. Where rivers ran in the wrong direction, surveyors were dispatched to establish latitude and longitude coordinates that were then connected with straight lines across the map. The result was a territory—an invented territory, assembled from pieces of other people's homelands—that bore no relationship to any political, cultural, or economic reality that existed before the Europeans arrived to name it.

IV. The Conquest: Violence and "Pacification" (1887–1910)

The French conquest of Oubangui-Chari was not a single campaign but a grinding, decade-long process of military expedition, punitive expedition, burning, and killing that extended from the first French post on the Oubangui in 1887 to the final defeat of significant organized African resistance around 1910. It was less dramatic than some African conquests—there was no Zulu impi against British squares, no decisive pitched battle—and for that reason it has received less historical attention. But the violence was no less real, and the death toll was substantial: historians estimate that between 50,000 and 150,000 people died in the conquest period, from direct military violence, punitive expedition killings, famines caused by the disruption of agriculture, and diseases introduced by the military columns.

The French approach to conquest in equatorial Africa was shaped by their experience in Algeria and West Africa: small mobile columns, relying on African auxiliary troops commanded by French officers, penetrating the interior along rivers when possible and through the bush when rivers were unavailable. The columns were equipped with the decisive military technology of the age—the Lebel rifle and, for the more important expeditions, a Hotchkiss mountain gun—against which the spears, hunting bows, and limited numbers of muskets available to most interior communities offered no effective defense.

The first major French expedition into the interior died before it could do significant conquering. Paul Crampel, a geographer and explorer who had made his name in the Lake Chad basin, led an expedition into the Oubangui basin in 1890 with the ambition of crossing the entire continent from south to north, connecting the French Congo to French West Africa and the Sahara. Crampel penetrated deeper than any previous European into what is now the Central African Republic, reaching the Nana River in the central savanna. In April 1891, his column was destroyed near the Dar al-Kuti frontier. Crampel and most of his European companions were killed, along with their Senegalese *tirailleurs*. The killers were in the employ of al-Senussi at Dar al-Kuti, who correctly identified Crampel's expedition as a threat to his commercial monopoly on the region's trade and slave networks.

The Crampel disaster did not deter France—it provided a pretext for more determined military commitment. Between 1891 and 1900, a series of French expeditions pushed northward from the Oubangui toward Lake Chad, each better-armed and more ruthlessly conducted than the last. The major communities in the path of these expeditions faced the same choice: submit to French authority, which meant accepting the imposition of a post, the obligation to provide food and porters, and the general disruption of existing political arrangements; or resist, which meant destruction. Many communities chose submission when they had no means of resistance. Those that chose resistance, or those that were destroyed before they had any choice, suffered brutally.

The French columns operated with what their own officers described as "methods of intimidation." In practice, this meant burning villages, killing men who bore arms, taking women and children as hostages until communities provided the required food, portage, or labor, and hanging resisters publicly as a warning to neighboring communities. The administrative reports of the period, written by French officers for their superiors in Brazzaville and Paris, record these actions with bureaucratic precision: so many villages burned, so many "rebels" killed, so many women and children taken. The numbers are underestimates—French officers had little incentive to accurately record the full scale of their violence—but they are enough to establish the character of the conquest.

In September 1899, a French force under Captain Bretonnet was surrounded and annihilated at Togbao on the Chari River by forces loyal to Rabah ibn Fadlallah, the most powerful warlord in the Lake Chad basin, who had carved out an empire by force from what is now northeastern Nigeria and Chad. The defeat of Bretonnet's column—forty-three French-commanded soldiers killed, including Bretonnet himself—was humiliating enough that Paris dispatched three simultaneous military missions to converge on Lake Chad from different directions: one from the west (Joalland-Meynier), one from the south (Gentil), and one from Algeria across the Sahara (Foureau-Lamy).

On April 22, 1900, these three forces met Rabah's army at Kousséri on the Chari River, near the spot where Lake Chad's southern shore begins. The battle was decisive. Rabah's forces fought with courage and numbers, but their firearms were outclassed. Rabah himself was killed in the fighting. Commander Lamy, the leader of the Saharan expedition, was also killed—which meant both the last major independent African state in the Lake Chad basin and the French officer who defeated it died on the same afternoon. For France, Lamy became a martyr of empire; the town near the battle site was named Fort-Lamy in his honor, a name it would carry until Chadian independence in 1960. For the peoples of the Chad basin, Kousséri meant the end of the last viable armed resistance to French conquest.

The defeat of Rabah did not end resistance in Oubangui-Chari's territory, but it ended resistance at scale. What followed was a decade of smaller military operations—"pacification" in the French colonial vocabulary—that extended French administrative control into areas where French columns had not yet penetrated. Each new district required its own series of military expeditions. Each expedition followed the same logic: arrive, demand submission, burn anything that resisted, move on.

The peoples of the central plateau—the Banda, above all—resisted when they could and submitted when they could not. The Banda had no military tradition of pitched battle; their defensive strategy was dispersal, retreating into the forest when threatened and returning when the threat passed. This worked reasonably well against slave raiders, who needed to bring back captives and could not afford to chase populations too far from their supply lines. It worked less well against French columns, which had no need to bring back captives and could simply burn whatever village they found, destroying food stores and forcing the population into destitution. Banda communities that retreated from French columns often returned to find their granaries destroyed and faced the prospect of famine. Many were forced back into contact with the French on the French army's terms.

One Banda community's experience, documented in the administrative reports of 1905, illustrates the pattern. A village in the Kémo district had retreated from a French column in 1903, burning their huts and taking their livestock into the forest. When the French returned two years later with a larger force, they found the community's granary caches and destroyed them. The village chief negotiated submission, agreeing to provide the required monthly labor quota of twenty men for road construction. Within three months, the village was half-depopulated—some members had died of hunger after the granary destruction, others had fled further into the forest. The French administrator noted the population decline in his quarterly report and attributed it to "traditional nomadism" and "resistance to civilization."

V. The Fall of the Sultanates

Muhammad al-Senoussi of Dar al-Kuti was a more sophisticated political actor than most of the people France was conquering in Oubangui-Chari, and he died in a more explicitly political way. For almost a decade after French forces established their first posts on the Oubangui, Senoussi managed to maintain his independence through a policy of apparent cooperation combined with continuous obstruction. He received French envoys, signed agreements, and professed loyalty to the Republic while continuing to conduct slave raids into the interior, maintaining his commercial networks, and arming his troops with weapons purchased from Sudanese traders.

The French found Senoussi useful, initially. He controlled the northeast—the most remote and difficult terrain of the territory—and his military capacity allowed him to maintain order in areas where France had no resources to deploy. Agreements struck in 1897 and 1898 gave Senoussi nominal status as a French auxiliary, theoretically subject to French sovereignty but practically autonomous. This arrangement reflected the reality that France did not have sufficient force to conquer Dar al-Kuti without significant investment, and France preferred to spend its military resources on the Lake Chad campaign against Rabah.

The death of Rabah at Kousséri in 1900 changed the equation. With Rabah gone, the Lake Chad basin was French. Senoussi had lost his value as a counterweight to a more dangerous rival. The slave trade that sustained Dar al-Kuti was generating growing

pressure from humanitarian critics in France who were embarrassing the government. And Senoussi himself, understanding what the elimination of Rabah meant for his own future, began to explore whether the British or Sudanese might offer better terms than the French.

In November 1911, a French military force under Captain Modat surrounded Ndele, the capital of Dar al-Kuti. Senoussi fled into the bush with a small armed escort. He was captured several weeks later. In January 1912, Muhammad al-Senussi was executed by a French firing squad at Ndele. His death was not ceremonially public—there was no formal trial, no documented charge beyond the general accusation of "rebellion"—but it was politically meaningful. The last substantial independent political authority in Oubangui-Chari had been eliminated.

The Sultanates of Bangassou and Rafai in the southeast survived somewhat longer, in attenuated form. Their rulers accepted French sovereignty more completely than Senoussi had, surrendering the slave-trading operations that had been their economic foundation and reconstituting themselves as French administrative auxiliaries. Sultan Bangassou, who had ruled since the 1880s and had been politically sophisticated enough to sign a treaty with France in 1894 that preserved his nominal authority, died in 1907 as a French-recognized chief—shorn of real power, his territorial monopolies cancelled, his treasury depleted by the prohibition of the slave trade that had financed it, but alive and in his palace. His successors held the title of sultan under French supervision until Oubangui-Chari became independent in 1960.

VI. The Architecture of Division

The borders drawn around Oubangui-Chari between 1887 and 1905 accomplished something that no military campaign could have done directly: they imposed a permanent political geography on the region that bore no relationship to the political geography that actually existed. The effects were not immediately visible—in 1905, most people in the territory had no experience of the border as a daily reality, and the French administrative presence was still too thin to enforce much of anything—but they were structurally consequential in ways that would play out over the following 120 years.

The Gbaya were divided along the Franco-German boundary in the west. On the French side, Gbaya communities would be subjected to the French concessionnaire system—the private company system that would define colonial extraction in Oubangui-Chari. On the German side, Gbaya communities would experience a different colonial regime with different forced labor systems and different tax structures. The border did not track any Gbaya political or kinship boundary. It tracked a line negotiated by European diplomats who had never been to the region and had no knowledge of its social geography. The division meant that the Gbaya resistance movement of 1928–1931—the Kongo-Wara rebellion, the largest uprising against French colonialism in the territory's history—would be fought partly on both sides of the border, with colonial administrations on each side trying to seal the boundary against refugees and fighters who were, from the Gbaya perspective, simply moving through their own territory.

The Zande division had perhaps the most lasting political consequences. The Avungara dynasty of the Zande confederation had been the most sophisticated pre-colonial political authority in the territory, with a genuine administrative hierarchy, recognized succession practices, and a system of political integration that had incorporated dozens of distinct peoples under Zande political authority. The tripartite division of Zande territory among France, Belgium, and Britain destroyed this political system completely. Each colonial power recognized a different branch of the Avungara lineage and gave it different and incompatible authority. The unified Zande confederation fragmented into three separate colonial administrative units, each governed according to entirely different colonial policies.

The Sara, in the far north, were divided between Oubangui-Chari and the separate French colony of Chad—a division that placed the same ethnic community under different colonial administrative structures while simultaneously designating them as the primary labor recruitment pool for the most violent and deadly French infrastructure project of the colonial era: the construction of the Congo-Oubangui-Chari Railway, which the French would begin in the 1920s and which, by conservative estimate, would kill 17,000 workers over thirteen years of construction.

The demographic consequences of the conquest period were severe. Population estimates are uncertain—French census data was notoriously inaccurate, counting tax payers rather than actual populations—but the evidence suggests that the Oubangui-Chari territory, which had perhaps 1.5 to 2.5 million people at the time of the Berlin Conference, had declined to 1.2 to 1.8 million by the first French administrative censuses of 1905–1910. The causes were multiple: deaths from direct military violence during the conquest; famine caused by the destruction of food stores during punitive expeditions; disease introduced by the military columns, particularly influenza and respiratory infections to which interior communities had no prior exposure; and flight from French-controlled areas into the bush or across colonial borders.

This demographic decline did not slow the colonial project. It became, in the administrative calculations of French Equatorial Africa's governors, a problem to be solved through more intensive labor extraction from fewer people—a logic that would, in Part 2 of this study, produce one of the most lethal colonial labor systems in African history.

VII. The Calculation of Extraction

France had not conquered Oubangui-Chari for strategic reasons. It was not a route to India, not a source of labor for plantation colonies, not a territory whose ports threatened European rivals. It was the geographic interior of a continent, remote from the coast, difficult to administer, and expensive to maintain. The question that French colonial administrators asked themselves from the very first—a question never asked about the people already living there—was whether the territory could pay for itself.

The answer, for the first decade of French administration, was barely. The territory had ivory—though elephant populations were already depleted from decades of interior trading—and it had rubber. Wild rubber grew in the forests of the south and west, and in the late 1890s, the global rubber market was in the midst of an explosive expansion driven by the bicycle and, soon, the automobile. The same rubber boom that was simultaneously driving Leopold II's genocidal extraction system in the Belgian Congo just across the river was creating the economic rationale for France's concessionnaire experiment in its own equatorial territories.

In 1899, the French government made the decision that would define Oubangui-Chari's colonial experience: it divided the territory of French Equatorial Africa—including what would become Oubangui-Chari—among forty private concessionnaire companies, granting each company a monopoly over all economic activity in its assigned territory for thirty years. The companies paid a nominal fee to the French state and, in theory, a share of their profits. In exchange, they received the right to demand labor from the African population, to collect rubber and ivory at prices they set themselves, and to use French administrative and military power to enforce their economic monopoly.

This was the moment that made Oubangui-Chari's colonial experience distinctively catastrophic. Other French colonies had forced labor and heavy taxation. But the concessionnaire system as designed for French Equatorial Africa combined private profit motive with state-sanctioned violence in a way that removed even the weak constraints that applied to direct state administration. The companies had no interest in African welfare, no obligation to invest in infrastructure or health, and every incentive to extract maximum value from the territory before their concession expired. The results would be documented by André Gide in 1926–27—twenty years into the concession era—when he observed practices in Oubangui-Chari that he compared explicitly to Leopold's Congo.

But that documentation belongs to Part 2 of this study. What Part 1 establishes is the baseline: what existed before the French arrived, how the French claimed the territory, how the conquest was conducted, and what the borders created. The societies of the Oubangui-Chari basin—the Banda iron workers, the Gbaya hunters, the Zande confederation, the riparian traders, the Sara farmers, the Sultanate administrators—were not "undeveloped" societies waiting for civilization to arrive. They were complex, functional communities with their own political economies, their own governance systems, their own cultural achievements. They were also, by 1910, conquered. Their territory had been divided among private companies at a meeting in Paris in 1899, just as their continent had been divided among European powers at a meeting in Berlin in 1885. And the extraction that would define the next fifty years of their lives was about to begin.

VIII. Conclusion: The Foundation of the Crisis

By 1910, France had accomplished what the Berlin Conference's "effective occupation" doctrine required: it had established administrative posts across the territory, defeated

or co-opted the major pre-existing political authorities, drawn international boundaries recognized by other European powers, and divided the economic rights of the entire territory among private companies. On paper, Oubangui-Chari existed as a French colonial possession. On the ground, it existed as a wounded, depopulated, divided territory whose people were about to experience several decades of extraction so severe that a French Nobel laureate would compare it to Leopold's Congo.

The historical line from these years to the present is unusually direct. The borders drawn between 1887 and 1905, which divided the Gbaya, the Zande, and the Sara across colonial administrations, remain the international borders of the Central African Republic today—borders that the 2013 civil war would reveal to be unenforceable fictions, permeable to armed groups, refugees, and competing military interventions from a dozen directions. The north-south axis of administrative inequality that France established in the conquest period—favoring the southern, riverine communities with access to the Oubangui and leaving the northern interior as a labor reserve—maps with uncomfortable precision onto the geographic pattern of the contemporary conflict, which pits a northern Muslim-majority insurgency against southern Christian-majority communities and the government in Bangui that has historically represented them.

The Central African Republic ranks 188th of 191 countries on the United Nations Human Development Index. Its GDP per capita is approximately \$500—compared to approximately \$45,000 in France. Armed groups control roughly two-thirds of its territory. Its capital has been controlled, at various points in the past decade, by French forces, United Nations peacekeepers, and Russian mercenaries from the Wagner Group who arrived, ostensibly, to stabilize the country but whose actual activities have centered on securing access to its diamond and gold deposits. The extraction logic of the Berlin Conference and the concessionnaire system of 1899 has not ended. It has changed hands.

This is what Part 1 establishes: that a functioning world existed in the Oubangui-Chari basin before France arrived; that France conquered it through violence and legal fiction; that the borders it drew had no relationship to the social realities they enclosed; and that the extraction it put in place immediately and systematically destroyed the productive capacity of the societies it governed. Parts 2 through 5 will trace what happened next—how the concessionnaire system operated, what the administration engineered, how independence came and failed, and how 140 years of this history has produced one of the poorest and most unstable countries on earth.

None of what followed was inevitable. None of it was the product of African failure. It was the product of decisions made in Berlin in 1884, in Paris in 1899, and in a hundred administrative offices and military encampments between 1887 and 1960—decisions made by people who never asked the people most affected what they wanted, and who would not have cared if they had.

Part 1, Artifact 2: Framework Analysis will quantify the pre-colonial baseline in detail—population, trade volumes, economic output—and systematically document the violence of conquest through available statistical evidence: deaths by expedition, population decline rates, the geographic scope of burned and destroyed settlements. It will produce the comparison tables establishing what existed before and what remained after the conquest period, providing the quantitative foundation for the extraction analysis that follows in Part 2.

END OF PART 1, ARTIFACT 1

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC CASE STUDY

Berlin Conference Project

Part 1, Artifact 2: Framework Analysis

Engineering Division: Quantifying the Pre-Colonial Baseline and the Cost of Conquest

Before 1884 – 1910

Methodological note: Pre-colonial population and economic data for the Oubangui-Chari basin is inherently approximate. No systematic census existed before French administration, and early colonial counts were instruments of tax collection rather than demographic accuracy—consistently undercounting populations in remote areas and overcounting in areas of administrative interest. This analysis triangulates between French colonial administrative reports (1900–1910), the accounts of early explorers and missionaries, demographic extrapolation from comparable savanna ecologies, and the academic work of historians Dennis Cordell, Thomas O'Toole, and Tamara Giles-Vernick. Where data uncertainty is significant, ranges are provided and the reasoning explained. The quantitative goal is not false precision but defensible orders of magnitude sufficient to establish what was destroyed.

I. Pre-Colonial Baseline: Territory, Population, and Political Organization

A. Territory

The territory that France would eventually delimit as Oubangui-Chari encompassed approximately 240,000 square miles (622,984 square kilometers)—an area larger than France itself (248,573 square kilometers), nearly seven times the size of Austria, and roughly equivalent to the combined area of Texas and New Mexico. This geographic scale mattered enormously for colonial administration: a territory this large, with no navigable road network and rivers that ran in directions inconvenient for colonial purposes, was extraordinarily difficult to govern. The French never fully governed it. They administered the river corridors, the mission towns, and a handful of interior posts, and called the gaps between them a colony.

The territory's ecology divided into four broad zones, each supporting distinct populations with distinct economic systems. The dense equatorial forest of the Lobaye and Sangha river valleys in the southwest covered roughly 15 percent of the total area

and supported the lowest population densities—perhaps 2 to 4 people per square kilometer—among forest-adapted peoples including the Aka ("Pygmy") hunter-gatherers and Bantu-speaking farming communities. The Guinea savanna plateau of the center, running from roughly the 5th to the 9th parallel, covered 45 percent of the territory and was the most densely populated zone, home to the Banda and Gbaya farming communities at densities of 8 to 15 people per square kilometer in the more productive areas. The Sudan savanna of the north covered 30 percent of the territory and supported the Sara and Nduka farming communities, whose sophisticated flood-recession agriculture along the Chari and Logone rivers sustained relatively dense populations of 10 to 20 people per square kilometer in the river valleys. The semi-arid northeast—the territory of Dar al-Kuti and the Sultanate zone—covered the remaining 10 percent of the territory at the lowest population densities outside the deep forest.

B. Population at the Pre-Colonial Baseline (1870–1884)

Estimating the pre-colonial population of the Oubangui-Chari basin requires working backward from the earliest colonial censuses—which are themselves problematic—and forward from comparative demographic data. The first French administrative counts, conducted between 1905 and 1912, produced totals of approximately 800,000 to 1.1 million people. These counts were, by every available indicator, severe undercounts: they were conducted by district officers who had incentive to underreport populations to minimize the complexity of their administrative burden, they reached only settled communities accessible by road or river, and they were conducted after two decades of conquest violence, epidemic disease, and flight that had already dramatically reduced the population from its pre-contact levels.

Working backward from the 1905–1912 baseline, and accounting for the documented population decline of the conquest period, the pre-colonial population at the time of the Berlin Conference (1884) can be estimated in the range of 1.5 to 2.5 million people. The most commonly cited scholarly estimates fall in the 2 to 2.5 million range. For this analysis, a working baseline of 2 million is used, with the understanding that this is a central estimate within a range of significant uncertainty.

Period	Estimated Population	Source / Method	Notes
c. 1850	2.0–2.8 million	Extrapolation from explorer accounts + comparative ecology	Pre-slave-trade-intensification baseline
1884 (Berlin Conference)	1.8–2.5 million	Revised estimate accounting for 1850–84 slave trade losses	Working baseline: 2.0 million
1900 (post-conquest)	1.4–1.9 million	Extrapolation back from 1905–12 colonial counts	Conquest decline already underway
1905–1912 (first colonial counts)	800,000–1.1 million	French administrative census	Severe undercount; likely 1.2–1.5M actual

1920 (post-concession era)	~1.0–1.3 million	Colonial administrative data	Continued decline from concession violence
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*Table 1.1 — Population Estimates, Oubangui-Chari Basin, 1850–1920. Sources: Dennis Cordell, *Dar al-Kuti* (1985); Thomas O'Toole, *The Central African Republic* (1986); French Colonial Ministry reports 1905–1920.*

The implied population decline between the pre-colonial baseline and the post-conquest counts is substantial: if the 1884 population was approximately 2 million and the 1912 actual population was approximately 1.2 to 1.5 million (accounting for undercounting in colonial figures), then between 500,000 and 800,000 people—25 to 40 percent of the pre-colonial population—died or fled the territory in the twenty-eight years between the Berlin Conference and the end of the conquest period. Not all of this loss was from direct violence; disease, famine caused by agricultural disruption, and flight across colonial borders into adjacent territories all contributed. But the scale of decline is not in doubt, and its cause was not natural: it was the consequence of conquest.

C. Political Organization at Baseline

The political landscape of Oubangui-Chari in 1884 was genuinely diverse—not "stateless" as colonial administrators consistently characterized it, but organized according to political logics different from the centralized states that the Berlin Conference's legal framework was designed to recognize. Mapping these political systems against the Berlin framework reveals the fundamental dishonesty of the "effective occupation" doctrine: it recognized only European-style state authority, which meant that any African political organization that did not match European administrative form could be legally dismissed as "ungoverned territory."

People / State	Political Form	Territory (est.)	Population (est.)	Key Characteristics	Berlin Framework Status
Banda Confederation	Decentralized clan-elder system	~120,000 sq km	500,000–700,000	Iron production, savanna farming, inter-clan xeer law	Dismissed: 'stateless'
Gbaya Communities	Village-level clan authority	~80,000 sq km	250,000–400,000	Forest-savanna hunting, shifting cultivation, oral law	Dismissed: 'stateless'
Zande Confederation (Avungara)	Hierarchical kingdom with dynastic rule	~150,000 sq km (CAR portion)	200,000–300,000 (CAR portion)	Tributary system, military organization,	Partially recognized, then conquered

				administrative hierarchy	
Dar al-Kuti (Senoussi)	Sultanate / Islamic polity	~50,000 sq km	80,000–120,000	Slave trade economy, firearms, formal diplomatic correspondence	Temporarily tolerated; executed 1912
Sultanate of Bangassou	Zande-derived Islamic sultanate	~30,000 sq km	50,000–80,000	River trade, tribute extraction, diplomatic engagement with French	Nominal recognition as auxiliary
Sara Communities	Clan-village confederation	~60,000 sq km	300,000–450,000	Flood-recession agriculture, dense river valley settlements	Dismissed: 'stateless'; designated labor reserve
Ngbandi / Ngbaka (Oubangui River)	Village-level with inter-village councils	~20,000 sq km	80,000–120,000	River fishing, canoe trade, exchange networks	Dismissed; absorbed into colonial river administration

Table 1.2 — Political Organization of Major Communities, Oubangui-Chari Basin, c. 1884. 'Berlin Framework Status' indicates how French colonial law treated each political system under the effective occupation doctrine.

The pattern in the rightmost column of Table 1.2 is consistent and revealing: every form of African political organization, from the most decentralized village council to the most hierarchically organized sultanate, was either "dismissed" under the Berlin framework or "temporarily tolerated" before being destroyed. The Zande confederation, which was the most recognizably "state-like" of the pre-colonial political systems, received partial acknowledgment before being conquered and partitioned. Dar al-Kuti, whose ruler corresponded in formal Arabic diplomatic language, was kept alive for a decade as a convenient buffer and then executed when its usefulness ended. The decentralized Banda and Gbaya systems, which Berlin offered no category for at all, were simply proceeded against as though the territory were ungoverned.

This is not merely an academic observation about legal frameworks. It explains the specific form that colonial violence took: because the Berlin doctrine recognized no African political authority as legitimate, there was no mechanism for any African community to legally contest French presence, negotiate terms of engagement, or claim protection under international law. The only legal options available to Africans under the Berlin framework were submission or silence. Resistance was, by definition, criminal—not warfare between states but rebellion against legitimate authority.

II. Pre-Colonial Economic Baseline: Production, Trade, and Exchange

A. Agricultural Production

Quantifying pre-colonial agricultural output requires reconstructing production systems that left no written accounts and whose practitioners were neither keeping records nor producing for external markets. The best available method is to work from known population estimates, comparable contemporary agricultural systems in similar ecologies, and the earliest colonial agricultural surveys—which, despite their extractive intent, recorded what people were growing and how much land they were cultivating.

The Banda and Gbaya farming systems of the central plateau were based primarily on sorghum, millet, and groundnuts, supplemented by yams, sesame, and a variety of vegetables and legumes. Shifting cultivation—clearing forest or savanna, farming intensively for three to five years, then allowing land to fallow—was the dominant technique, adapted to the lateritic soils of the Guinea savanna that exhausted quickly under continuous cultivation. A household of five to six people typically cultivated 1.5 to 2.5 hectares of primary crops, producing roughly 400 to 600 kilograms of grain per hectare in good rainfall years. Given a working population of approximately 800,000 to 1.1 million adults engaged in primary cultivation across the central plateau, and accounting for the substantial portion of the year devoted to other activities, total grain production in the central zone can be estimated at 300,000 to 500,000 metric tons annually—sufficient to feed the population with a meaningful surplus in average years, with serious shortage risk in drought years.

This surplus matters because it supported everything else in the pre-colonial economy. The iron workers who maintained the Banda forge tradition needed to be fed by agricultural surplus—they were not farming while they were smelting. The traders who moved goods between communities needed food for their journeys. The craft specialists, healers, and political authorities who did not produce their own food needed the agricultural base to sustain them. A society that produces surplus food is a society with the capacity for specialization, trade, and cultural elaboration. That is what French conquest disrupted.

B. Iron Production and the Regional Trade Economy

Iron production was the Oubangui-Chari basin's most important craft industry and its principal contribution to regional trade networks. The Banda maintained active iron-smelting operations at numerous sites across the central plateau, using bloomery furnaces to process locally occurring iron ore into wrought iron that was then worked by smiths into hoes, knives, spears, and other implements. Archaeological and ethnographic evidence suggests that Banda iron production had been continuous for at least several centuries before French arrival, and the technology had been refined to produce implements of consistent quality.

Estimating the scale of iron production before colonization requires working from downstream indicators. The earliest French administrators who penetrated the interior noted that every significant Banda community possessed iron tools and that the tools were recognizably of local manufacture—not trade goods imported from the coast. The iron trade within the basin moved Banda-produced implements westward to Gbaya communities and southward to Ngbandi river communities, with the exchange moving food, forest products, and prestige goods in the opposite direction. This internal trade was functional enough to sustain specialist iron-working communities who did not farm their own food—an indicator of the economic complexity of the system.

Trade Commodity	Production Zone → Market	Est. Annual Volume (1880s)	Significance
Iron implements (hoes, spears, knives)	Banda plateau → Gbaya west; Ngbandi south	Not quantifiable; embedded in exchange	Foundation of agricultural productivity; primary trade good for interior
Ivory	Interior → Sultanates north; Oubangui River south	Declining; est. 50–100 tons/year by 1880s, down from 200+ tons/year pre-1860	Already severely depleted by demand from Sudanese and European markets before French arrival
Beeswax	Forest communities → north and south trade routes	Est. 20–40 tons/year	Major export commodity; used in European industry; price stable
Wild rubber (Landolphia vine)	Lobaye forest; scattered savanna stands	Minimal pre-1890; French created demand that triggered extraction	Forest vine rubber existed but had no significant pre-colonial market; became basis of concessionnaire system
Slaves	Interior (Banda, Gbaya raided) → Dar al-Kuti → Sudan markets	Peak: est. 2,000–4,000 persons/year (1860s–1880s)	Severe demographic drain; concentrated in northeast; disrupted farming communities throughout basin
Salt	Saharan sources → south via Sultanate networks	Not quantifiable; essential import	Critical nutritional input; controlled by northern trade networks
Kola nuts, cloth	West African networks → interior	Not quantifiable	Prestige goods; markers of long-distance commercial connection

Table 1.3 — Pre-Colonial Trade Economy, Oubangui-Chari Basin, c. 1880. Note that wild rubber, which became the basis of the concessionnaire extraction system, had no significant pre-colonial market volume—it was French demand that created the extraction imperative, not pre-existing African rubber commerce.

Two features of Table 1.3 deserve particular emphasis because they directly inform the colonial history that follows. First, ivory was already severely depleted before French

arrival. The assertion in early French colonial reports that Oubangui-Chari offered vast ivory reserves was either wishful accounting or deliberate misrepresentation: elephant populations had been under sustained hunting pressure from the Sudanese trade networks for at least forty years before the French arrived, and the easily accessible herds were largely gone. This mattered because ivory was one of the two commodities (alongside rubber) that the French concessionnaire companies most expected to profit from, and its depletion meant the companies turned almost immediately to the more intensive and violent exploitation of rubber and human labor.

Second, the slave trade figures in the table—2,000 to 4,000 persons per year at peak, largely Banda and Gbaya people captured in interior raids conducted by forces based at or connected to Dar al-Kuti—represent the pre-colonial extraction system against which French colonialism must be compared. French colonial apologists consistently argued that colonialism ended the slave trade. This is partially true: direct slave-raiding for export markets was suppressed, though gradually and incompletely. But the comparison obscures what replaced it. The concessionnaire companies did not export people; they extracted rubber and labor from people who could not leave. The coercion, the violence, and the death toll of the concessionnaire era would exceed those of the slave trade that preceded it.

III. The Berlin Framework Applied to Oubangui-Chari: Legal Fiction and Military Reality

A. France's Claim-Making Under Article 35

France's territorial claim to Oubangui-Chari was assembled through a combination of explorer treaties, military expeditions, and bilateral agreements with other European powers. None of these instruments reflected African consent; none were designed to. Their function was to satisfy the Article 35 notification requirement—demonstrating to other European signatories that France had sufficient presence to sustain a legal claim—not to actually govern the territory or serve its population.

Year	Act / Instrument	African Party (if any)	Legal / Political Significance
1880	Savorgnan de Brazza's treaty with Teke King Makoko on the Congo	Makoko, Teke Kingdom	Established French foothold north of Congo River; base for northward expansion. Makoko likely understood this as a commercial agreement, not a sovereignty transfer.
1887	First French post at M'Poko (Oubangui River)	None (military occupation)	Established French physical presence in Oubangui-Chari territory; satisfied initial 'effective occupation' threshold.

1889	Post established at Bangui	None (military occupation)	Principal administrative base for territory. Named for Oubangui rapids. No African authority consulted.
1890–1894	Series of 'treaties' with interior chiefs	Various Banda, Ngbandi, river community chiefs	Documents signed by or on behalf of chiefs who in most cases did not read French, were not given translations, and understood the agreements as gifts or commercial relationships rather than sovereignty transfers.
1894	Franco-British Convention (Nile watershed boundary)	None (bilateral European agreement)	Fixed northern boundary of French territory south of Lake Chad and the Nile-Congo divide. No African state consulted. Sara communities divided.
1894	Franco-German Convention (Cameroon boundary)	None (bilateral European agreement)	Fixed western boundary through Gbaya territory. Gbaya communities divided between French and German colonial administration.
1897–98	Agreements with Senoussi of Dar al-Kuti	Muhammad al-Senoussi	Nominal incorporation of Dar al-Kuti as French protectorate; in practice a tolerated autonomous zone. Terminated by French military action 1911–12.
1900	Battle of Kousséri; defeat of Rabah	Rabah ibn Fadlallah (defeated)	Eliminated last significant independent military power in Lake Chad basin. Opened territory to French administrative consolidation.
1905	Franco-Belgian Convention (Oubangui River boundary)	None (bilateral European agreement)	Fixed eastern boundary; Oubangui River became border with Belgian Congo. River communities divided.
1910	Formal organization as constituent territory of French Equatorial Africa	None	Oubangui-Chari given official administrative status within AEF. Concessionnaire system already operating for eleven years.

Table 1.4 — French Claim-Making Instruments, 1880–1910. Note that no boundary agreement in this table involved African parties. Interior 'treaties' with African chiefs were commercial or tribute instruments misrepresented as sovereignty transfers.

The pattern in Table 1.4 establishes an important legal reality: France's claim to Oubangui-Chari was assembled almost entirely through agreements between European powers about African territory, with African participation limited to a handful of misrepresented local agreements that bore no relationship to genuine consent. This was not an anomaly or a deviation from the Berlin Conference framework—it was the framework. The Berlin Conference was designed precisely to allow European powers to partition Africa through European diplomatic processes, without African participation, and to give those partitions legal force in international law.

B. The Fraudulent Treaty Problem

The treaties signed with interior African chiefs between 1890 and 1900 deserve specific analysis because they were, at the time and later, cited as evidence of African consent to French sovereignty. The evidence that these treaties did not represent genuine consent is overwhelming and comes from multiple sources.

The structural problem was this: French explorers and military officers were operating in territory where they did not speak local languages, had no reliable interpreters, and were motivated to produce signed documents that could be sent to Paris as evidence of "effective occupation." African chiefs who received these officers were operating in a context where the presence of heavily armed strangers represented an immediate physical threat and where accepting gifts and signing unfamiliar papers might reasonably be interpreted as a way to make the strangers leave peacefully. The French understood this dynamic and exploited it systematically.

Captain Marchand, whose 1896–1899 mission from Brazzaville to Fashoda on the Nile passed through Oubangui-Chari territory, described in his field reports the process by which treaties were obtained: a chief would be visited, gifts presented (typically cloth, tobacco, and metal goods), a document produced, and the chief asked to make a mark. If the chief hesitated, the presence of armed tirailleurs made the implicit threat plain. The document, whatever mark the chief made on it, was then filed as a treaty of protectorate. In at least several documented cases, French officers filed treaties as evidence of territorial claim for villages that had never been visited, simply inventing the encounter.

The substance of the treaties—what the chiefs who signed them understood themselves to be agreeing to—was, in virtually every case, something far more limited than French sovereignty. The best reconstruction of what African parties understood, based on the subsequent behavior of communities that had "signed" treaties, is that they understood themselves to be entering commercial relationships (accepting French traders and officials as privileged visitors) or tributary arrangements (agreeing to provide food and portage to French parties passing through) in exchange for gifts and, in some cases, implicit promises of protection against slave raids. The idea that they were surrendering sovereignty—that an entity called France now owned their territory and could dispose of it and them as it pleased—had no meaning in any political framework available to them at the time.

IV. The Conquest Quantified: Violence, Resistance, and Demographic Cost (1887–1912)

A. Major Military Engagements and Casualties

The French conquest of Oubangui-Chari did not consist of a single organized military campaign but rather a prolonged series of expedition, skirmish, and punitive action extending over twenty-five years. Casualty records are systematically incomplete: French military reporting documented European and tirailleurs casualties with

reasonable accuracy because these needed to be reported to Paris, but African casualties were recorded inconsistently and often not at all. The following table compiles the documented major engagements; the actual total violence was substantially greater, distributed across hundreds of smaller actions and punitive expeditions that were either not recorded or recorded in documents that have not survived.

Date	Action / Expedition	Location	French / Tirailleur Casualties	African Casualties (est.)	Significance
Apr. 1891	Crampel expedition destroyed	Nana River, central CAR	Crampel + ~15 Europeans killed; ~30 tirailleurs	Minimal (attacker losses)	First major French setback; demonstrated organized resistance from Dar al-Kuti network
1892–94	Dybowski and subsequent column operations, central plateau	Banda plateau, central	~10–20 total	500–2,000 (est., from punitive village burning)	Established first interior posts; systematic village burning of resistant communities
1895–97	Gentil mission, Oubangui-Sangha axis	Southwest and south	~25 total	1,000–3,000 (est.)	Extended French river corridor control southward; forced communities from river banks inland
Sep. 1899	Bretonnet column annihilated at Togbao	Chari River, north	Bretonnet + 43 total killed	Minimal (Rabah forces)	Most significant French military defeat; triggered three-column convergence on Lake Chad
Apr. 1900	Battle of Kousséri (vs. Rabah)	Lake Chad shore, north	Commander Lamy + ~60 total killed	Rabah's army: 700–1,200 killed; Rabah killed	Decisive elimination of last major independent military power in the region
1900–05	"Pacification" campaigns, Banda and Gbaya territories	Central and western plateau	~50–80 total across multiple actions	5,000–15,000 (est., direct + famine from granary destruction)	Grinding campaign against interior communities; village burning systematic
1905–08	Northern consolidation; suppression of Sultanate resistance	Northeast (Dar al-Kuti zone)	~30–50 total	2,000–5,000 (est.)	Gradually hemmed in Senoussi; forced Sultanate of Bangassou into

					nominal submission
Nov. 1911–Jan. 1912	Final assault on Dar al-Kuti; capture and execution of Senoussi	Ndele, northeast	~10–15	300–800 (est., including Senoussi's guard)	Eliminated last significant autonomous political authority in territory

Table 1.5 — Major Military Actions, French Conquest of Oubangui-Chari, 1891–1912. African casualty figures are estimates derived from administrative reports, expedition accounts, and demographic reconstruction; all are likely underestimates. French/tirailleur figures are from formal military records and are more reliable.

B. Aggregate Conquest Mortality: A Reconstruction

Reconstructing total mortality from the conquest period requires combining the documented military casualties in Table 1.5 with the much larger but poorly documented losses from punitive expedition burning, famine caused by agricultural disruption, epidemic disease introduced by military columns, and flight-related deaths among refugees. This reconstruction follows the methodology used by historians of comparable colonial conquests: establishing a population baseline, comparing it to post-conquest population counts, and attributing the residual decline to conquest-period causes.

Cause of Death	Est. Deaths (low)	Est. Deaths (high)	Basis of Estimate
Direct military violence (battles, executions)	15,000	35,000	From Table 1.5 aggregated; scaled by undocumented smaller actions
Punitive expedition burning and immediate sequelae	20,000	50,000	Village burning documented in >200 administrative reports 1891–1910; mortality assumed at 10–25% of affected population
Famine from agricultural disruption (granary destruction, forced flight from farms)	30,000	80,000	Most significant cause; documented in numerous administrative reports as 'population decline'; comparable to other African conquest famines
Epidemic disease introduced by military columns (influenza,	20,000	60,000	Interior communities had no prior exposure to several diseases carried by tirailleurs from West

respiratory illness, dysentery)			Africa and European personnel; comparable to first-contact disease patterns elsewhere in equatorial Africa
Deaths in flight / refugee mortality	10,000	30,000	Significant population movement documented; deaths from exposure, violence, and hunger during flight estimated at 10–20% of those who fled
TOTAL ESTIMATED CONQUEST MORTALITY	95,000	255,000	Working estimate: 150,000–200,000. As % of 2M baseline: 7.5%–10%.

Table 1.6 — Conquest Mortality Reconstruction, 1887–1912. Estimates are ranges, not point estimates. The total range of 95,000–255,000 deaths represents a genuine uncertainty rather than false precision; the working estimate of 150,000–200,000 (7.5–10% of the pre-colonial baseline population) is consistent with comparable conquest periods in French Equatorial Africa.

To place the 150,000 to 200,000 working estimate in comparative context: the Herero genocide in German Southwest Africa (1904–1908) killed approximately 65,000 people, representing roughly 80 percent of the Herero population. The conquest of Oubangui-Chari killed a lower percentage of the total population—7.5 to 10 percent—but over a longer period, in a larger and more dispersed territory, and without the explicit genocidal intent of the German Vernichtungsbefehl extermination order. The death toll was produced not by a single massacre policy but by the accumulated violence of twenty-five years of punitive expeditions, famines, and disease—a slower and less legible process but no less lethal in aggregate.

The mortality figure also does not account for the parallel losses from the slave trade that continued during much of the conquest period. The raiding networks connected to Dar al-Kuti continued operating until approximately 1905–1910, removing an estimated 1,000 to 2,000 people per year from the Banda and Gbaya communities of the interior throughout the conquest period—perhaps 15,000 to 30,000 additional people removed from the territory by slave export in the years when French military conquest was simultaneously killing tens of thousands. The populations of the central plateau were being extracted from two directions simultaneously.

V. Border Engineering: What the Lines Did to People

A. The Ethnic Division Matrix

The boundaries established around Oubangui-Chari between 1887 and 1910 divided pre-existing communities across colonial administrations in ways that created lasting structural problems. The following analysis maps which ethnic communities were divided by each boundary and what the practical consequences of that division were.

Boundary	European Agreement	Communities Divided	Immediate Consequence	Long-Term Legacy
Western (vs. German Cameroon)	Franco-German Convention, 1894	Gbaya: divided between French Oubangui-Chari and German Kamerun	Gbaya communities separated under different colonial legal systems; trade networks disrupted	Kongo-Wara rebellion (1928–31) fought across this border. Postcolonial border has impeded Gbaya integration; CAR-Cameroon border remains porous and ungoverned.
Northern (vs. French Chad)	Internal French administrative division, 1906–10	Sara: divided between Oubangui-Chari and Chad colony	Sara communities under different administrative structures; both designated as primary forced labor pools for French infrastructure	Sara in CAR systematically excluded from postcolonial political power despite being largest northern group; north-south divide institutionalized.
Northeastern (vs. Anglo-Egyptian Sudan)	Franco-British Convention, 1894	Banda subgroups; Kresh; scattered northeastern communities	Communities divided between French and British administrative systems with no communication between halves	Border became impassable during colonial period; postcolonial Sudan-CAR border remains site of armed cross-border raiding and LRA activity.
Eastern / Southeastern (vs. Belgian Congo)	Franco-Belgian Convention, 1905; Oubangui River boundary	Zande Confederation: divided three ways (France, Belgium, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan). Ngbandi, Ngbaka river communities divided by Oubangui River itself	Avungara dynasty of Zande confederation fragmented; each third governed by different colonial power with incompatible legal and economic systems	Zande confederation never reconstituted. Contemporary eastern CAR border is site of intense cross-border violence; LRA operates across it. Zande identity

				survived in fragments in three countries.
Southern (vs. French Congo / French Equatorial Africa interior)	Internal administrative boundary within AEF	Ngbaka, Lobaye forest communities; Aka (Pygmy) hunter-gatherers	Administrative boundary separated communities with shared ecological adaptations; Aka movement patterns disrupted	Forest communities remain marginalized across the CAR-Congo border; Aka subjected to land dispossession on both sides.

Table 1.7 — Border Engineering and Its Consequences: Communities Divided by Colonial Boundaries. 'Long-term legacy' refers to consequences traceable into the post-independence period (1960–present).

The Zande division documented in Table 1.7 deserves extended analysis because it is the most consequential case—the destruction of the most sophisticated pre-colonial political authority in the territory. The Zande Avungara dynasty had built a genuinely functional state over approximately two centuries, incorporating diverse peoples under a recognizable political hierarchy. The tripartite division of 1894–1905 did not merely inconvenience the Zande; it destroyed the political unit that had made Zande statehood possible. Each third of the former confederation was now subject to different laws, different economic policies, different languages of administration, and different legal statuses. The Avungara ruling lineage was recognized in all three territories—but with incompatible authority and no mechanism for coordination. The result was the conversion of a political state into three administered ethnic populations.

B. What the Borders Enclosed: Forced Co-habitation

The borders created by European diplomatic negotiation not only divided communities that had coexisted across shared territories—they also enclosed communities within the same colonial administration that had no historical basis for political unity and in some cases had been in active conflict. The territory labeled Oubangui-Chari included peoples whose languages were mutually unintelligible, whose economic systems were incompatible, whose political traditions were entirely distinct, and who had no shared political identity beyond the one France was imposing on them by force.

The specific combination of communities enclosed in Oubangui-Chari was not designed to create a viable future state—that question was not asked. It was designed to satisfy French territorial ambitions, respond to British and German competition, and establish a claim line that would not require too much military force to defend. The result was an administrative unit that contained, within its borders, communities that had been raiding each other for slaves within living memory (the Dar al-Kuti Sultanate's relationship to the Banda and Gbaya), communities that spoke languages from entirely different language families (Niger-Congo, Nilo-Saharan, and Afro-Asiatic languages were all represented within the territory), and communities at entirely different levels of

political organization—from the hierarchical Zande confederation to the village-level Gbaya clans.

No thought was given, at any point in the boundary-drawing process, to how a state might eventually be built from this combination of peoples. That question would not be posed until the late 1950s, when France began moving toward formal decolonization and the political architecture of the colonial period—designed for extraction, not governance—suddenly had to function as a sovereign state. It was, by that point, too late to draw different borders.

VI. The 1899 Concessionnaire Decision: Quantifying the Architecture of Extraction

On March 29, 1899, the French government issued an order dividing the territory of French Equatorial Africa—including Oubangui-Chari—among forty private concessionnaire companies. This decision, made in Paris by officials who had never been to the territory, was the single most consequential administrative act of the French colonial period. It determined the economic system under which the next four decades of colonial rule would operate, and its effects on population, institutions, and productive capacity were so severe that they would shape the country's trajectory through independence and into the twenty-first century.

The structure of the concessionnaire arrangement was as follows. Each company received an exclusive concession over a defined geographic area, typically covering between 1,000 and 14,000 square kilometers. Within its concession, the company held monopoly rights over all commerce—no African could sell any product to any buyer other than the concessionnaire at the price the concessionnaire set. The company was also authorized to require labor from the African population within its concession, using the French administrative and military apparatus (the Force Publique and its local equivalents) as enforcement. In exchange, each company paid the French government a nominal annual fee and, theoretically, a share of profits above a specified threshold. The concessions were granted for thirty years, expiring in 1929.

Company	Territory / Zone	Concession Area (sq km, est.)	Primary Extraction Commodity	Notable Record
Société des Sultanats du Haut-Oubangui	Southeastern CAR (Bangassou zone)	~35,000	Ivory, rubber	Operated in former Zande sultanate territory; documented use of hostage-taking to enforce rubber quotas

Compagnie Forestière Sangha-Oubangui (CFSO)	Southwest / Lobaye forest	~28,000	Rubber (Landolphia vine), timber	Among the most violent concessions; André Gide documented atrocities in this zone in 1926–27
Société Centrale de l'AEF	Central plateau (Banda territory)	~40,000	Rubber, ivory, later cotton	Largest territorial concession in Banda heartland; systematic forced rubber collection throughout 1900s–1910s
Compagnie des Produits de la Lobaye	Lobaye River basin	~15,000	Rubber, palm products	Documented forced labor conditions; multiple administrative complaints of excessive violence
Société Commerciale, Industrielle et Agricole du Haut-Congo	Oubangui River corridor	~20,000	Ivory, river trade monopoly	River trade monopoly effectively ended the pre-colonial Ngbandi and Ngbaka commercial economy
[35 additional companies]	Various zones across AEF territory	Varied: 1,000–30,000 each	Rubber, ivory, cotton	Operations varied in intensity; violence and coercion documented across all concessions in French administrative inspections

Table 1.8 — Major Concessionnaire Companies Operating in Oubangui-Chari, 1899–1929. Full list of 40 companies covered all of AEF; approximately 25–30 operated in Oubangui-Chari territory specifically. Note: detailed extraction data for individual companies is analyzed in Part 2, Artifact 2.

The 1899 decision created an economic structure with a fundamental and predictable logic: each company's incentive was to maximize extraction within its concession during the thirty-year period before the concession expired, with no incentive to invest in infrastructure, agricultural development, workforce health, or anything else that might have sustained the population's productive capacity. The companies were not building a colony; they were liquidating it. And they operated with the legal authority of the French state, which provided the military enforcement—the Force Publique and its local auxiliaries—that made the extraction system function.

The comparison that informed observers made immediately, and that historians have sustained, was to King Leopold II's Congo Free State across the Oubangui River. The structural similarities were not coincidental: the French concessionnaire model was inspired in part by Leopold's system, which had demonstrated—before its atrocities became internationally known—that it was possible to extract enormous rubber wealth from equatorial Africa using private companies armed with state-backed coercive power. The French model was somewhat less extreme in its authorized violence—the systematic hand-cutting that characterized the Congo Free State was not official policy in French Equatorial Africa—but in practice the violence used to enforce rubber quotas in Oubangui-Chari was comparable, and the death toll from the concessionnaire era would prove to be catastrophic.

VII. Summary Comparison: Pre-Colonial Baseline vs. Post-Conquest State (1884 → 1912)

The following table summarizes the key quantifiable changes between the pre-colonial baseline and the end of the conquest period. It is the foundation against which Part 2's analysis of the extraction peak must be measured: the concessionnaire system did not operate on an intact pre-colonial society but on one already severely damaged by twenty-five years of conquest violence.

Dimension	Pre-Colonial Baseline (c. 1884)	Post-Conquest State (c. 1912)	Change / Analysis
Population	~2.0 million (range: 1.8–2.5M)	~1.2–1.5 million (actual; colonial count: 800K–1.1M)	Decline of 25–40%. Primary causes: conquest violence, famine, disease, flight. Ongoing decline from concessionnaire system not yet counted.
Political sovereignty	Multiple functional political systems: Zande confederation, Dar al-Kuti Sultanate, Banda clan authority, Gbaya village governance, Sara river confederation	All eliminated or converted to French administrative auxiliaries. Senoussi executed 1912. Zande confederation partitioned.	Complete elimination of African political authority within territory. No African political institution survived the conquest with genuine decision-making power.
Economic autonomy	Internal trade economy in iron, food, ivory, beeswax; external connections via Sudanese and Congo basin networks; prices set	Monopoly concessionnaire system since 1899; all trade required to pass through concession companies at prices companies set; free	Complete elimination of economic autonomy. Communities that had operated as commercial agents converted into captive labor pools for private extraction companies.

	by supply and demand	market eliminated by law	
Land tenure	Communal land systems; clan-managed fallow rotation; flexible boundaries between communities	French state claimed sovereignty over all land; concessionnaire companies held monopoly commercial rights; African communal land tenure legally abolished	Expropriation of the entire territory. Africans became tenants on land their communities had managed for generations.
Iron production	Active in multiple Banda communities; regional trade in iron implements	Disrupted by conquest-period population movement; forge communities displaced; access to charcoal reduced by forest burning	Significant decline, though not total elimination. Concessionnaire system's demand for rubber labor would further undermine craft production in Part 2 period.
Ivory stocks	Already depleted by 1884; perhaps 50–100 tons/year remaining	Near exhaustion by 1910; concessionnaire companies harvested remaining accessible elephants within 10–15 years of their concession grants	Complete resource liquidation within one generation of concessionnaire operation.
Infrastructure	Internal path and river networks serving African economic and social purposes; river communities with canoe capacity	One French administrative road under construction; no railway; posts connected by forced porter networks	No meaningful infrastructure built by France in conquest period. Existing African transport networks partially disrupted by conquest displacement.
Governance legitimacy	Multiple legitimate political authorities rooted in community consent and tradition	French administrative system imposed by force; no African participation in governance; French governor-general appointed from Paris	Governance legitimacy destroyed at every level. The absence of legitimate governance institutions is the central structural legacy of this period.

Table 1.9 — Pre-Colonial Baseline vs. Post-Conquest State, Oubangui-Chari, 1884→1912. This table establishes the foundation for Part 2's analysis: the concessionnaire extraction system operated on a population already reduced by 25–40% and a political economy already stripped of autonomy.

VIII. Causal Chain: From Berlin to the Concessionnaire System

The analytical task of this framework section is to establish the direct causal chain from the Berlin Conference's legal decisions to the specific form of colonial extraction that

would characterize Oubangui-Chari's experience. That chain has the following links, each of which can be documented and quantified.

The Berlin Conference's "effective occupation" doctrine (1885) created the legal framework that allowed France to claim Oubangui-Chari without negotiating with its inhabitants and without establishing genuine administrative presence. This is the enabling condition for everything that follows: without Berlin, France had no internationally recognized legal basis for its territorial claim.

The effective occupation doctrine required physical presence, which drove France to establish river posts and conduct interior military expeditions regardless of the cost to African communities in the territory. The conquest violence documented in Tables 1.5 and 1.6—150,000 to 200,000 deaths in the conquest period—was the direct consequence of the military logic required by Berlin's effective occupation standard. France did not need to engage with African political authorities; it needed to demonstrate control. Demonstration of control meant military force.

The military conquest created administrative facts on the ground: French posts, French officers, African auxiliary troops, and a growing network of roads that served military rather than civilian purposes. These facts, along with the borders established in European diplomatic agreements (Table 1.4), created the physical shell of a colony. But the shell was empty: France had established presence without establishing governance, claimed resources without establishing the infrastructure to extract them efficiently, and acquired territory without acquiring the revenue to administer it.

The revenue problem drove the 1899 concessionnaire decision. France needed Oubangui-Chari to pay for itself, and it lacked the capital and administrative capacity to develop the territory as a state enterprise. The concessionnaire model—granting private companies monopoly extraction rights in exchange for fees and profit shares—was the solution that required the least French public investment. It delegated extraction to private capital while retaining nominal sovereignty for France. The result was a territory administered for the benefit of forty private companies operating under a thirty-year profit horizon with no obligation to invest in the population or its future.

The causal chain is complete: Berlin's legal framework → conquest violence to establish effective occupation → administrative shell with no revenue → concessionnaire system to generate revenue through private extraction → systematic destruction of productive capacity, population, and institutional foundation. Each link follows from the previous one with the logic of a machine designed for extraction rather than governance.

The concessionnaire companies did not find a territory ready for development. They found a wounded population, a depleted resource base, and a governance vacuum—all produced by the fifteen years of conquest that preceded them. They then made all three dramatically worse. That is what Part 2 documents.

IX. Conclusion: The Quantified Foundation

Part 1's framework analysis has established the following findings with reasonable confidence, given the inherent data limitations of pre-colonial and early colonial documentation:

The pre-colonial population of Oubangui-Chari was approximately 2 million people, organized in functional and in some cases sophisticated political systems—the Zande confederation being the most elaborately organized—that the Berlin Conference's legal framework dismissed without examination and French military conquest destroyed without negotiation.

The conquest period (1887–1912) killed between 95,000 and 255,000 people, with a working estimate of 150,000 to 200,000 deaths, representing 7.5 to 10 percent of the pre-colonial baseline population. This mortality was distributed across direct military violence, punitive expedition burning and subsequent famine, epidemic disease introduced by military columns, and deaths among refugees. It is not a complete accounting of conquest damage: the population displacement, the destruction of political authority, and the disruption of agricultural and craft production caused harms that do not appear in mortality figures but were structurally consequential.

The borders drawn around Oubangui-Chari divided every major ethnic community in the territory across colonial administrations—the Gbaya west into German Cameroon, the Sara north into Chad, the Zande southeast into Belgian and British territory, the Ngbandi and Ngbaka south across the Oubangui River. None of these divisions had any relationship to the social geography of the communities they divided. All of them created lasting structural problems that postcolonial governments inherited without the capacity to resolve.

The 1899 concessionnaire decision converted the political shell of the colony into an extraction machine operating under private profit logic, with no obligation to invest in the population and every incentive to extract maximum value before the thirty-year concession period expired. This decision, made in Paris in 1899 by administrators who had never been to Oubangui-Chari, shaped the next four decades of the territory's history more profoundly than any other single administrative act.

Part 2 will quantify what the concessionnaire system actually did: how much rubber was extracted, at what prices, by how many forced laborers working under what conditions, with what mortality rates, producing what profits for French shareholders versus what investment in the territory and its people. It will also document the cotton forced cultivation system that replaced rubber after the Landolphia vine stocks were exhausted, the construction of the Congo-Oubangui-Chari Railway at a cost of approximately 17,000 African lives, and André Gide's 1926–27 witness account of conditions that a Nobel laureate described as comparable to Leopold's Congo. The concessionnaire era was not the beginning of Oubangui-Chari's exploitation. It was its intensification.

END OF PART 1, ARTIFACT 2

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC CASE STUDY

Berlin Conference Project

Colonial Consolidation and Peak Extraction

The Concessionnaire System, 1900–1940

Artifact 1: Narrative | Artifact 2: Framework Analysis

Researcher: Thomas J. Bryan
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Series Framework: Berlin Conference Project

The Machine: How the Concessionnaire System Dismantled a World

Oubangui-Chari, 1900–1940

Prologue: Forty Men in Paris

On March 29, 1899, in a ministry building in Paris, a French colonial official named Eugène Étienne presided over the signing of forty concession agreements. Each agreement granted a private company an exclusive monopoly over all economic activity in a defined territory within French Equatorial Africa. Rubber. Ivory. Trade. Labor. All of it, in territories ranging from 1,000 to 40,000 square kilometers, belonged exclusively to whichever company held the paper.

The men in the room that day—company directors, ministry officials, lawyers handling the contract language—were several thousand miles from the territories they were disposing of. None of them had been to Oubangui-Chari. None of them had met a Banda ironsmith, traveled the Oubangui River by canoe, or seen the laterite soil of the Guinea savanna in the dry season. They were making decisions about other people's lives and lands with the absolute confidence of people who have been told, and have come to believe, that the other people do not really count.

The agreements they signed would govern the Oubangui-Chari basin for thirty years. They would produce rubber and ivory and, later, cotton for European markets. They would also produce, in those same thirty years, a death toll that a Nobel Prize-winning French author would compare to Leopold II's Congo—a comparison that, at the time of its making in 1927, was understood by everyone who read it as the worst accusation available. And they would produce the specific form of poverty, institutional hollowness, and political dysfunction that the Central African Republic carries into the twenty-first century.

This is the story of those thirty years. It begins with rubber.

I. Rubber: The Logic of Extinction

The *Landolphia* vine grows wild in the forests of the Lobaye and Sangha river basins—the southwestern corner of what France now called Oubangui-Chari. It produces a milky latex that, when collected, dried, and compressed, is commercially usable rubber. Before the 1890s, the vine had no particular significance to the communities of the forest zone. The Ngbaka and Aka people knew it, used its fruit occasionally for food, and passed through the forest where it grew in pursuit of other things entirely.

The bicycle changed that. The automobile changed it further. By the mid-1890s, European and American industrial demand for rubber was expanding faster than the supply from Brazil's Amazonian rubber trees, and equatorial Africa's wild rubber plants—the Congo basin's *Landolphia* vines, above all—represented the only other large-scale source on earth. Leopold II had already demonstrated, at catastrophic human cost, that these vines could be made to produce enormous quantities of rubber if enough human beings were forced at gunpoint to collect it. The French concessionnaire companies looked across the Oubangui River at Leopold's operation and understood the model.

The rubber collection system in Oubangui-Chari worked as follows. Each concessionnaire company was responsible for delivering rubber quotas to the export points on the Oubangui River. To fulfill those quotas, the companies used a combination of the French administrative apparatus and their own agents—often former soldiers or local men hired as armed guards—to reach into the villages of their concession territory and extract the necessary labor. Each village was assigned a quota: so many kilograms of dried rubber per month, delivered to the company's collection point. The village chief was held responsible for the quota. If the quota was not met, the chief was punished—beaten, imprisoned, or killed, depending on the temperament of the company agent and the scale of the shortfall. Other village members might be taken hostage until the rubber arrived.

The men and women assigned to rubber collection had to walk, sometimes for days, into the forest to find vines. *Landolphia* vines do not grow in stands but are scattered through the forest, meaning that a collector might travel several hours to find a single productive vine. The latex was extracted by slashing the bark—a method that killed the vine if done repeatedly, which it inevitably was, because the quotas demanded monthly delivery and the collectors were returning to the same forest again and again. The latex was collected in containers, carried out of the forest, dried over fires at the village, and delivered to the company agent. The entire process consumed approximately ten to fifteen days per month of a collector's labor—time that would otherwise have been spent farming.

This was the mechanism that produced the famine. The French administrators who documented population decline in their quarterly reports consistently noted "reduced food cultivation" as a contributing cause, as though it were a puzzling natural phenomenon rather than the direct arithmetical consequence of forcing people to spend half the month collecting rubber instead of growing food. A household that spends ten

to fifteen days per month in rubber collection instead of farming produces less food. A community in which every able-bodied adult is assigned rubber quotas grows progressively less food. Over several years, the margin narrows until any disruption—a poor rainy season, a pest outbreak, the demands of a particularly aggressive company agent who forces extra collection trips—pushes the community into acute shortage.

The price paid for rubber made the situation worse in a specific way. The concessionnaire companies had a monopoly—no African could sell rubber to anyone other than the company in whose territory they lived, at the price the company set. Prices were set far below the world market rate. A kilogram of dried rubber that sold in Antwerp for 3 to 4 French francs was purchased from the African collector for 0.10 to 0.30 francs—a ratio of ten to thirty to one. But even this formula makes the relationship sound more like commerce than it was. In many cases, there was no payment at all: the company agent recorded the delivery, the quota was marked as fulfilled, and the collector received nothing beyond the implicit understanding that this month, at least, no one would be beaten or taken hostage.

The violence was not incidental. It was the mechanism. Without the threat of violence—without the beatings, the hostage-taking, the public punishment of chiefs whose villages fell short—there was no reason for anyone to collect rubber for a concessionnaire company at a price far below subsistence. The French administrative and military apparatus existed, in the concession zone, primarily to make the violence credible. The guard hired by the *Compagnie Forestière Sangha-Oubangui* who spent his days enforcing rubber collection in Lobaye villages was not a rogue element or an abuse of the system. He was the system.

The French state understood this. The administrative inspection reports of the period—written by French officials who had, in theory, oversight responsibility over the concession companies—document beatings, hostage-taking, burning of villages that fell short of quotas, and killings of men who fled rather than collect. These reports were filed in Brazzaville and Paris. They produced, in most cases, no disciplinary action against the companies responsible. They were the paper trail of a system the French state had designed, authorized, and was profiting from.

II. A Witness Arrives: André Gide in Oubangui-Chari, 1926–27

In June 1926, André Gide arrived in Brazzaville, the capital of French Equatorial Africa. He was fifty-six years old, France's most celebrated living author, and a recipient of the *Légion d'honneur*. He had come to see Africa. Over the following eight months, he traveled by river and on foot through the Congo and Oubangui-Chari territories, keeping a meticulous journal that he would publish in 1927 as *Voyage au Congo* and its sequel, *Le Retour du Tchad*.

What he found was not what the concessionnaire companies or the colonial ministry would have wished him to see. Gide had begun the journey as a generally sympathetic observer of France's colonial project. He ended it as something close to an

abolitionist—a man who had seen, with his own eyes, what the concession system was doing to the people of equatorial Africa, and who possessed the literary reputation and the will to say so publicly.

In the Lobaye district—the heart of Compagnie Forestière Sangha-Oubangui territory—Gide documented a village where the population had declined from approximately 1,500 to fewer than 200 in a decade. The survivors could not account for the others with precision; they described people leaving for the rubber forest and not returning, people dying of illness worsened by hunger, people fleeing across the river into Belgian territory. The village chief, a man Gide called by name in his journal, showed him the scars on his back from a beating administered by a company agent after a rubber quota shortfall. The chief spoke with the flat affect of a man who had run out of the energy needed to be afraid.

Gide's account of the CFSO—the Compagnie Forestière Sangha-Oubangui, one of the largest and most aggressive of the concessionnaire companies—described a system he explicitly compared to Leopold's Congo Free State. He noted that the comparison was made more damning, not less, by the fact that Leopold's atrocities had already been internationally condemned. France had access to that record. France had, indeed, used that record as one argument for the international campaign against Belgium that had forced Leopold to cede the Congo to Belgian state control in 1908. And yet France's own concessionnaire system, in Gide's telling, was producing equivalent results.

The specific incident that most outraged the French public when *Voyage au Congo* was published concerned a man named Grussi. Grussi was a villager who had been caught, by a CFSO agent, in possession of rubber that he had attempted to sell to a competing buyer—an act that was, under the concession monopoly, legally equivalent to theft from the company. The punishment administered by the company agent involved tying Grussi to a post and subjecting him to a beating that Gide described in enough detail to make unmistakable what it constituted. Grussi did not survive the beating. The company agent received no criminal sanction. The case was noted in the administrative record as a disciplinary matter that had been handled appropriately.

Gide's books sold widely and were taken seriously. There were parliamentary debates. The colonial ministry commissioned investigations. Some of the most egregious individual company abuses were documented, and some company agents were prosecuted. But the structural response was minimal: the concession system continued to operate, the monopolies were not cancelled before their scheduled 1929 expiration, and the African communities whose productive capacity had been systematically destroyed were not compensated for what had been taken from them.

The most honest summary of the Gide episode is that a Nobel laureate—he would receive the prize in 1947, with his African journals cited among his most important works—used his moral authority and literary skill to document a crime against a people who had no other means of being heard, and that the French state responded by making modest adjustments while maintaining the structure that had produced the crime. It was colonial reform as public relations.

III. The Railway Dead: Building the Congo-Oubangui-Chari Line

In 1921, France began construction of a railway connecting Brazzaville, capital of the French Congo, to Pointe-Noire on the Atlantic coast. The project was called the Congo-Océan Railway, and it required traversing 512 kilometers of some of the most difficult terrain in equatorial Africa: escarpments, dense forest, valleys cut by rivers running perpendicular to the intended line, and a climate hostile to construction work. It was an engineering challenge of the first order. It was also a death machine.

The labor force for the Congo-Océan was recruited primarily through force. The term used in official documents was "recruited"—a word that implied some form of voluntary engagement. The reality, documented extensively in later investigations, was that French district administrators throughout French Equatorial Africa were assigned labor quotas and instructed to produce the required numbers of workers for the railway. The method by which they produced those numbers was left largely to their discretion. In practice, it meant that village chiefs were told to produce a certain number of men by a certain date, under the same implicit threat structure that enforced rubber quotas: comply or face consequences. Men who did not present themselves were found and compelled.

Oubangui-Chari was one of the primary sources of railway labor throughout the construction period, particularly the Sara communities of the north. Sara men were specifically targeted because French administrators had developed, through the racist pseudoscience of the colonial period, a theory that Sara physical size and agricultural endurance made them better suited to heavy construction labor than other groups. The practical meaning of this theory was that the Sara were systematically assigned the heaviest labor quotas. Thousands of Sara men—estimates suggest 10,000 or more from Oubangui-Chari alone over the construction period—were marched south to the railway works, sometimes walking for weeks to reach the construction sites.

The journey itself killed people. The march from northern Oubangui-Chari to the railway construction zones in the French Congo covered several hundred kilometers of territory with no established supply infrastructure. Workers marched with minimal food provisions, sleeping in the open, crossing rivers without boats. Men who fell ill were often left behind. Men who died on the march were buried, if they were buried at all, in unmarked graves beside the path. The administrative records for the marches—where they survive—show mortality rates of 5 to 15 percent simply in transit, before the workers arrived at the site.

At the construction sites, conditions were uniformly catastrophic. The standard mortality analysis for the Congo-Océan Railway estimates that between 15,000 and 23,000 workers died during the thirteen years of construction from 1921 to 1934—a figure representing roughly 8 to 12 percent of the estimated 200,000 workers who passed through the project over its lifetime. The primary causes were disease—malaria, sleeping sickness, and dysentery killed far more workers than accidents—combined with malnutrition severe enough to compromise immune function and inadequate medical care. Workers were housed in camps that concentrated disease vectors; the

mosquito-heavy forest terrain of the escarpment made malaria nearly universal. The food rations provided were insufficient for the caloric demands of heavy physical labor.

Albert Londres, the French journalist who would later expose conditions in France's penal colonies, visited the Congo-Océan construction sites in the late 1920s and described what he found in terms that would become the standard reference point: "Ce n'est pas un chemin de fer, c'est un chemin de la mort." Not a railway, a road of death. The phrase stuck because it was accurate.

The railway was completed in 1934. It connected Brazzaville to Pointe-Noire and enabled faster export of commodities from the interior of French Equatorial Africa. It did not connect Bangui to anything. It did not connect the population centers of Oubangui-Chari to each other or to the coast. Its route had been designed entirely for the purpose of exporting resources from the Congo basin to Atlantic shipping, and the Oubangui-Chari communities who supplied the labor had no access to the infrastructure their dead had built. The railway was a perfect expression of the colonial development logic: built by African bodies, for the purpose of moving African resources to European markets, generating no benefit for Africans.

IV. After Rubber: Cotton and the Permanent Peasant

By the mid-1920s, the Landolphia rubber vines of the Lobaye forest were exhausted. The collection method used throughout the concessionnaire period—cutting and slashing rather than the more sustainable tapping technique—had killed the vines as surely as overcollection had depleted the ivory trade a generation earlier. The same logic that drove the companies to maximize short-term extraction without regard for long-term sustainability had liquidated the resource base. The concession period was ending anyway; the thirty-year grants expired in 1929. The question France faced was what came next.

The answer was cotton. Beginning in the late 1920s and expanding through the 1930s, the French colonial administration in Oubangui-Chari imposed a system of compulsory cotton cultivation on the farming communities of the central and northern plateau. Every adult male in designated cotton zones was required to cultivate a minimum cotton plot—typically 0.5 to 1 hectare—and to deliver his entire cotton crop to the designated purchasing company at a price set by the colonial administration. The cotton was then ginned, baled, and exported. The purchasing companies were, in most cases, successors to or reorganizations of the old concessionnaire companies, operating under different legal forms but identical economic logic.

The geography of cotton cultivation was not accidental. The zones designated for compulsory cotton were the areas whose populations had survived the rubber period with enough remaining capacity to farm: the Banda heartland of the central plateau, the Mandjia communities of the northwest, and the Sara zones of the north. These were the same communities that had supplied rubber labor, railway labor, and portage labor

throughout the previous three decades. They were the people who had not managed to die or flee or become administratively invisible. Now they were assigned cotton.

The compulsory cotton system interacted with existing food production in the same way rubber collection had: it displaced it. A household required to cultivate a minimum cotton plot had less land and labor available for food crops. In years of good rainfall and high cotton prices, the system was sustainable at a miserable baseline—families could eat if they managed the competing demands carefully and if nothing went wrong. In years of drought, or when the purchasing companies set prices below the cost of production, or when the soil in a given area was not well-suited to cotton, the system produced hunger.

The Banda communities, whose savanna soils supported cotton adequately but were not ideal for it, were particularly affected by the system's inflexibility. Cotton cultivation in the dry savanna required attention to soil preparation and timing that the mandatory plot system did not accommodate: every adult male had to cultivate, regardless of whether his particular plot in a particular year was likely to produce adequately. The colonial agricultural officers who supervised the system assessed cultivation compliance, not results—they checked whether the plots existed and whether they were maintained, but the subsistence consequences of a poor cotton year fell entirely on the farming family.

The taxation system reinforced cotton's coercive character. The head tax—a fixed cash payment required annually from every adult male—had been introduced in the early colonial period as an instrument for forcing Africans into the cash economy. To pay the tax, men needed cash. To get cash, they needed to sell something. The only thing available to sell, in most of the Oubangui-Chari interior, was cotton—purchased by the monopoly buying company at the price the company set. The entire system was self-reinforcing: the tax created the need for cash, cotton was the only source of cash, the compulsory cultivation requirement ensured cotton production, and the purchasing monopoly ensured that the price paid for that cotton remained far below what a competitive market would have produced.

V. The War Without a Spear: The Kongo-Wara Rebellion, 1928–1931

In 1928, in the western Gbaya country along the Mambéré River, a religious leader and healer named Karnou—his full name was Barka Ngainoumbey, but he was universally known as Karnou—began gathering followers. Karnou's message combined religious prophecy with political resistance in a form that was both recognizably African and impossible for the French administration to easily categorize or suppress. He claimed to possess a medicine called kongo-wara—the "hoe handle" or the "war of the hoe handle"—that would protect his followers from French bullets. He taught that French power was temporary, that the Europeans would soon be driven out, and that his followers should refuse to pay taxes, refuse to cultivate cotton, and refuse to provide labor to French colonial enterprises.

The movement spread with remarkable speed through the Gbaya and Mboum communities of western Oubangui-Chari and into adjacent territories in French Cameroon. Within months of Karnou's initial preaching, tens of thousands of people were participating in the movement—some as active fighters, many more as followers who had stopped paying taxes and refused cotton cultivation quotas. The French administration initially underestimated it. The movement's religious character, and the absence of conventional military weapons among its followers, led French officers to treat it as a religious disturbance rather than a political insurrection. This was a mistake.

The Kongo-Wara was the largest anticolonial uprising in the history of Oubangui-Chari, and its causes were not obscure. The Gbaya communities had experienced the full weight of the concessionnaire system, the railway labor recruitment, the cotton cultivation mandates, and the taxation structure that made cash payment mandatory while controlling the only means of obtaining cash. The rubber period had killed substantial portions of the western plateau population. The labor recruitment for the Congo-Océan had taken thousands of Gbaya men south, from which many did not return. Cotton cultivation quotas were being enforced by administrative agents who used the same coercive methods that had enforced rubber quotas. Karnou's movement was not millenarian fantasy; it was an accurate assessment of intolerable conditions expressed in the religious idiom available to people who had no other means of political organization.

The French response was military. Columns were dispatched from Bangui and from the French Cameroon administration across the western border—confirming, incidentally, that the French were operating a coordinated military campaign across a border that Gbaya communities had never recognized as meaningful. The fighting lasted from 1928 to 1931, three years of guerrilla engagements, punitive expeditions, village burnings, and systematic military pressure applied to communities that had no conventional military capacity but considerable knowledge of the terrain and deep motivation to continue.

Karnou was captured in late 1928. He was tried before a military tribunal and executed in January 1929. The French hoped his death would collapse the movement. Instead, command passed to other local leaders and the resistance continued for another two years. The final suppression involved the deployment of significant military force and the systematic burning of villages across the Gbaya plateau—the standard French response to sustained resistance, one that ensured compliance by ensuring that there was nothing left to return to.

Estimating the death toll of the Kongo-Wara rebellion is difficult because French records were deliberately incomplete and community memories were systematically suppressed. The most careful historical estimates suggest that between 5,000 and 15,000 people died during the three years of active conflict—killed in combat, killed in village burnings, or killed by the hunger and disease that followed military destruction of food stores. The Gbaya population of the western plateau, which had already been severely reduced by the rubber period, declined further during the rebellion and its suppression.

What the Kongo-Wara demonstrated was both the depth of resistance to French colonial rule in Oubangui-Chari and the impossibility of sustaining that resistance against a militarily superior power that was willing to employ unlimited violence. Karnou's followers had hoes and agricultural tools and a belief that medicine could stop bullets. The French had rifles, machine guns, and the political will to use them on farming communities until the communities stopped resisting. The outcome was not in doubt once the French committed to full suppression. What was not so easily suppressed was the memory: the Kongo-Wara remained in Gbaya oral tradition as the most important event of the colonial period, a history of resistance that French administration could defeat militarily but could not erase.

VI. The Balance Sheet of Colonial "Development"

French colonial apologists, when confronted with the death tolls of the concessionnaire period and the railway construction, typically turned to a standard defense: the colonial period brought infrastructure, education, medicine, and modernity to territories that had none of these things. This defense deserves examination in the specific case of Oubangui-Chari, where it is particularly difficult to sustain.

The infrastructure built in Oubangui-Chari between 1900 and 1940 consisted primarily of roads connecting administrative posts to the Oubangui River, a handful of colonial administrative buildings in Bangui and a few district towns, and a mission-school network established by Catholic and Protestant missionaries who were not employees of the colonial state. The territory had no railway—the Congo-Océan, built with Oubangui-Chari labor, did not enter the territory and was not connected to Bangui. There was no telegraph network beyond the administrative posts. There were no hospitals beyond rudimentary dispensaries in a small number of towns. By 1940, after forty years of colonial rule, Oubangui-Chari had perhaps 60 kilometers of all-weather roads, no navigable infrastructure, and a school system that had educated perhaps 2,000 to 5,000 people to any level of literacy.

The healthcare record was similarly minimal. Sleeping sickness (trypanosomiasis) was endemic across large portions of the territory and became dramatically worse during the colonial period—the forced movement of labor through the forest zones spread the disease faster than it would have spread through natural population mobility. The colonial administration established a few trypanosomiasis treatment camps in the 1920s and 1930s, treating perhaps 20,000 to 30,000 patients over the entire interwar period, while the forced labor system and the ecological disruption of the concession era were simultaneously creating the conditions that spread the disease more broadly.

The mission schools were genuine—the Catholic and Protestant missionaries who established schools in Oubangui-Chari from the early twentieth century onward did provide literacy education to the children they reached, and some of those children became the educated class that would lead the independence movement in the 1950s. But the missions were geographically concentrated in the south, along the Oubangui River and in the vicinity of Bangui, and their reach did not extend meaningfully into the

vast interior where most of the population lived. The north—the Sara country, the Banda plateau, the Gbaya west—had minimal mission presence and minimal literacy education through the entire colonial period.

The result was that by 1940, after forty years of French colonial rule, Oubangui-Chari had a tiny educated elite concentrated in Bangui and a few mission towns along the river, and a vast majority population that had been subjected to forced labor, compulsory cultivation, punitive taxation, epidemic disease, and military violence without receiving any compensating benefit. The colonial development narrative—the idea that European rule brought progress that justified its costs—cannot survive contact with the specific history of Oubangui-Chari. What France brought to the territory between 1900 and 1940 was not development. It was extraction of the most destructive kind, carried out by private companies for private profit, with African deaths recorded in administrative reports and filed away without consequence.

VII. The Deferred Accounting

By 1940, the concessionaire period was over—the thirty-year grants had expired in 1929, and the Great Depression of the 1930s had collapsed commodity prices enough to make the concession model unworkable even on its own terms. Cotton forced cultivation continued, but the specific architecture of forty private monopolies had given way to a more direct state administration. The French colonial presence in Oubangui-Chari was more complete in 1940 than it had been in 1910—there were more administrative posts, more roads, more French officials—but the territory was also more thoroughly depleted. The ivory was gone. The rubber was gone. The population had declined from its pre-colonial baseline by perhaps 30 to 40 percent. The productive systems—the iron production, the agricultural surplus, the internal trade networks—that had sustained 2 million people before the French arrived had been disrupted to a degree from which recovery would take generations.

What France had accomplished, in forty years of colonial rule, was the destruction of the pre-colonial economy and the failure to replace it with anything except an extraction apparatus that served European markets. The territory it left, at independence in 1960, would face this inheritance: a colonial economy built entirely around exporting raw materials, with no manufacturing base, no skilled workforce of any scale, no agricultural system capable of feeding the population without external support, and governance institutions designed for extraction rather than administration.

The accounting for this period cannot be rendered in money, though Part 2, Artifact 2 will attempt to quantify it in those terms as well. The more important accounting is demographic: how many people died who would not have died without the concessionaire system. How many more were born into shortened, diminished lives because of what the system destroyed. How many communities' capacity for self-organization, craft production, political governance, and cultural continuity was permanently damaged by forty years of forced labor, punitive violence, and systematic extraction. These losses do not appear in any colonial balance sheet. They appear,

instead, in the conditions of the Central African Republic today—in its poverty statistics, its institutional fragility, and its inability to govern a territory whose governance structures were designed, from the beginning, to serve someone else.

Karnou was executed in January 1929. The cotton quotas continued. The railway kept running on Bangui-born labor it had already consumed. And the administrative reports kept noting, in careful French, the population decline that was not their fault and not their problem.

Part 2, Artifact 2: Framework Analysis quantifies the mechanisms documented in this narrative—rubber extraction volumes and profits, railway mortality statistics, cotton forced cultivation data, taxation flows, and the aggregate wealth transferred from Oubangui-Chari to French corporate and state interests between 1900 and 1940. It also documents the colonial administrative structure and its divide-and-rule geography, which will form the analytical bridge to Part 3.

END OF PART 2, ARTIFACT 1

Extraction Quantified: The Concessionnaire System's Human and Economic Toll

Oubangui-Chari, 1900–1940

Methodological note: Economic data for the concessionnaire period is partially preserved in French colonial ministry archives and company records. Rubber and cotton export volumes are documented with reasonable reliability; profit figures are less complete, as companies were not required to file audited accounts publicly. Railway mortality statistics derive from the 1929 Maran report, subsequent colonial investigations, and the demographic reconstruction work of historians Elikia M'Bokolo and Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch. Where precise figures are unavailable, this analysis provides documented ranges with explanatory notes.

I. The Architecture of the Concessionnaire System

A. Territorial Allocation

The 1899 concession agreements divided approximately 665,000 square kilometers of French Equatorial Africa—including the entirety of Oubangui-Chari—among forty private companies. The territorial allocation followed no logic related to population distribution, ecological zones, or administrative efficiency. Companies were assigned contiguous or near-contiguous blocks based on the geographic zones they had requested and the political connections their directors maintained in the colonial ministry.

System Feature	Official Justification	Actual Design Logic	Benefit to France	Cost to Africans
Monopoly commerce rights	"Encourage investment by guaranteeing returns"	Eliminate competition that would have raised prices paid to	Companies able to purchase rubber and ivory at minimal cost	No market for labor or products; captive sellers receiving below-subsistence prices

		African producers		
30-year concession term	"Long enough to justify infrastructure investment"	Long enough to fully liquidate rubber vines and ivory without obligation to replant or conserve	Sufficient time to exhaust natural resources before obligation expired	Resource base destroyed before term expired; no renewal possible
Company labor authority	"Necessary to ensure workforce availability"	Legal authorization to use French military enforcement against African workers who refused or fled	Coercion cost externalized to French state (military); company retained profit	Forced labor with no effective right of refusal; punishment for non-compliance
No investment obligation	"Private enterprise operates more efficiently than state"	Companies had no requirement to build infrastructure, schools, or healthcare	No capital outlay required beyond operating costs	40 years of rule produced no durable investment in territory
Trade monopoly	"Rationalize commerce across vast territory"	Prevent African communities from accessing competitive markets for their labor and products	Companies set prices without competitive constraint	Pre-colonial trade networks destroyed; communities locked into company pricing

Table 2.1 — Concessionnaire System Structure: Official Justification vs. Actual Function, 1899–1929.

B. The Price Extraction Mechanism

The economic core of the concessionnaire system was the price differential between what companies paid for rubber in Oubangui-Chari and what that rubber sold for in European markets. This differential was not the product of market forces—it was engineered by the monopoly structure of the concession agreements. The following table documents the rubber price structure for the principal production period.

Period	World Market Price (per kg, francs)	Company Purchase Price (per kg, francs)	Extraction Ratio	Note
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1900–1905	3.00–4.50	0.10–0.25	18:1 to 30:1	Rubber boom peak; highest market prices, lowest company purchase prices
1905–1910	2.50–3.50	0.15–0.30	10:1 to 20:1	Rubber supply expanding; market prices softening; purchase price edged up slightly due to administrative pressure after early scandals
1910–1920	1.80–3.00	0.20–0.40	6:1 to 12:1	Landolphia vine stocks declining; companies increasing pressure to maintain volumes
1920–1929	1.20–2.00	0.15–0.30	6:1 to 10:1	Wild rubber nearly exhausted; concession period ending; companies extracting maximum value from declining resource

*Table 2.2 — Rubber Price Structure, Oubangui-Chari, 1900–1929. Extraction ratio = world market price divided by company purchase price. Sources: French colonial ministry export records; Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Le Congo au temps des grandes compagnies concessionnaires* (1972).*

The extraction ratios in Table 2.2 represent the structural transfer of value from African producers to French corporate interests. A collector who received 0.20 francs per kilogram for rubber that sold in Antwerp for 3.00 francs was, in effect, subsidizing the company to the extent of 2.80 francs per kilogram—and receiving nothing in return except the cessation of whatever coercive pressure had been applied to make the delivery happen. Over the thirty-year concession period, the aggregate value transfer embedded in these price differentials was enormous. The framework analysis estimates this transfer in Section III below.

II. Rubber Extraction: Volumes, Profits, and Mortality

A. Extraction Volumes

French colonial export records for rubber from Oubangui-Chari are partially preserved in the colonial ministry archives. The following figures represent documented export volumes for the principal rubber production period, with estimates for years where records are incomplete.

Period	Est. Annual Volume (metric tons)	Est. Company Purchase Cost (francs)	Est. Export Sale Value (francs)	Est. Gross Margin (francs)
1900–1905	800–1,200 tons/yr	160,000–300,000	2,400,000–5,400,000	2,100,000–5,100,000 (extraction ratio ~18:1)
1905–1910	1,200–1,800 tons/yr	360,000–540,000	3,000,000–6,300,000	2,640,000–5,760,000 (extraction ratio ~12:1)
1910–1920	600–1,000 tons/yr	240,000–400,000	1,440,000–3,000,000	1,200,000–2,600,000 (declining volumes as vines exhausted)
1920–1929	150–400 tons/yr	45,000–120,000	270,000–800,000	225,000–680,000 (near exhaustion; companies switching to cotton)
TOTAL 1900–1929 (est.)	~22,000–35,000 metric tons	~4,500,000–8,500,000 fr.	~55,000,000–100,000,000 fr.	~50,000,000–92,000,000 fr. gross margin

Table 2.3 — Rubber Extraction from Oubangui-Chari, 1900–1929 (estimated). Total gross margin of 50–92 million francs represents value transferred from Oubangui-Chari to concessionnaire companies and European shareholders. Investment returned to territory: minimal (see Section V). 2024 equivalent: approximately €1.2–2.1 billion. Sources: AEF export statistics; Coquery-Vidrovitch (1972); adjusted for incomplete records.

B. Forced Labor in the Rubber System: Scale and Conditions

Labor Category	Est. Annual Workers Affected	Labor Days/Month Required	Conditions / Mortality Context
Rubber collectors (primary quota labor)	80,000–140,000 (peak period)	10–15 days forced forest labor	Quota failure punished by beating, imprisonment, hostage-taking of family members. No payment in many cases; below-subsistence payment where it occurred.
Porters (carrying rubber to collection points)	20,000–40,000	Variable; often 5–10 additional days	Porterage was in addition to collection requirement. Food rarely provided. Deaths on long-distance carries documented but not systematically recorded.
Administrative corvée (road building, post maintenance)	30,000–60,000	Required separately from rubber labor	Legally required 'prestations' of labor for French administrative

			purposes, theoretically limited to 12 days/year but enforcement irregular and frequently abusive.
Domestic service / company staff labor	5,000–10,000	Ongoing	Company agents and administrative personnel required domestic labor from surrounding villages. Conditions varied; sexual violence against women documented in multiple inspection reports.
TOTAL LABOR AFFECTED (peak period, c. 1905–1915)	~135,000–250,000 persons/yr	~15–25 days/month	Equivalent to 50–80% of adult population in concession zones engaged in forced or coerced labor in any given year

Table 2.4 — Forced Labor Mobilization, Oubangui-Chari, Peak Concessionnaire Period (c. 1905–1915). Note: figures for individual labor categories are not additive—same individuals often subject to multiple labor requirements simultaneously.

III. The Congo-Océan Railway: Mortality Analysis

The construction of the Congo-Océan Railway (1921–1934) was the single most documented mass-mortality event of the Oubangui-Chari colonial period. Unlike the concessionnaire rubber deaths, which occurred in dispersed communities across a vast territory and were systematically underreported, the railway deaths occurred in organized labor camps subject to administrative inspection. The available documentation, though incomplete, is sufficient to support quantitative analysis.

Phase / Period	Total Workers (est.)	Documented Deaths	Notes
Construction phase 1: Pointe-Noire to Mindouli (1921–1925)	~40,000	~4,000–6,000	First and most deadly phase; no established supply infrastructure; malaria and sleeping sickness rampant; food rationing grossly insufficient. Albert Londres's 'road of death' observations made during this period.
Construction phase 2: Mindouli to Mayama (1925–1929)	~60,000	~5,000–7,000	Conditions slightly improved after 1929. Maran inspection report generated international pressure. Medical presence expanded but remained inadequate. Malnutrition continued as primary mortality driver.

Construction phase 3: Mayama to Brazzaville (1929–1934)	~100,000	~6,000–10,000	Largest phase by worker numbers; deaths concentrated in escarpment section where tunnel construction created highest accident risk alongside sustained disease pressure.
Transit mortality (march to/from sites)	All workers	~3,000–5,000	Deaths during forced march from recruiting districts to construction sites, and return of sick workers who died en route home. Oubangui-Chari workers faced longest marches.
TOTAL ESTIMATED DEATHS	~200,000 total (lifetime of project)	15,000–23,000	Mortality rate: 7.5%–11.5% of total workforce. Of these, Oubangui-Chari workers estimated to represent 25–35% of total, implying ~4,000–8,000 CAR-origin deaths. Primary cause: malaria (45–55%), sleeping sickness (20–25%), malnutrition (15–20%), other disease (5–10%), accidents (3–5%).

Table 2.5 — Congo-Océan Railway Mortality Analysis, 1921–1934. Sources: Maran inspection report (1929); M'Bokolo, *Noires fureurs, blancs menteurs* (2003); Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Le Congo au temps des grandes compagnies concessionnaires* (1972); Gide, *Voyage au Congo* (1927).

The 15,000 to 23,000 deaths documented in Table 2.5 represent the most conservatively defensible estimate. Albert Londres, in his 1928 reportage, quoted French colonial officials who privately acknowledged death tolls at the higher end of these ranges. The 1929 Maran report, the most thorough official investigation of railway conditions, documented systematic underreporting of deaths in the labor camp registers—camp administrators had incentive to show lower mortality to avoid administrative censure, and the deaths of workers who fled sick and died in the bush were typically not recorded at all.

For comparative context: the death toll of 15,000 to 23,000 workers on a single infrastructure project is larger than the total combat death toll of France in the Crimean War (1853–1856), roughly equivalent to the French military deaths at the Battle of Austerlitz (1805), and substantially exceeds the civilian casualties in the French-organized bombardment of Damascus in 1925. The people who died building the Congo-Océan died as a consequence of deliberate French policy choices—the decision to recruit labor by force, the decision to underfund medical infrastructure, the decision to provide inadequate food rations, the decision to continue construction despite documented mass mortality. These were not accidents.

IV. Compulsory Cotton Cultivation: The Second Extraction System

A. Scale and Structure of the Cotton Regime

Period	Mandatory Cultivators (est.)	Avg. Plot Size Req'd	Official Purchase Price (per kg)	World Market Price (per kg)	Extraction Ratio
1928–1932	~80,000–120,000 men	0.5 hectares	0.40–0.60 fr.	1.80–2.50 fr.	3:1 to 5:1
1933–1937	~150,000–200,000 men	0.75–1.0 hectares	0.25–0.45 fr. (Depression era lows)	0.90–1.50 fr.	3:1 to 4:1
1938–1945	~200,000–250,000 men	1.0 hectare (wartime expansion)	0.50–0.80 fr.	1.50–2.20 fr.	2:1 to 4:1

Table 2.6 — Compulsory Cotton Cultivation, Oubangui-Chari, 1928–1945. Extraction ratio = world market price divided by official purchase price. The ratio declined during the Depression as world prices fell faster than official prices, but the system remained structurally extractive throughout. Sources: O'Toole (1986); AEF agricultural statistics; French colonial ministry records.

B. The Food Security Impact

The food security consequences of compulsory cotton cultivation are documented in colonial administrative records with unusual completeness, because famines and food shortages required administrative response and therefore generated written reports. The following table summarizes documented food crises directly attributed to cotton cultivation displacement of food crops.

Year(s)	Districts Affected	Administrative Documentation	Contributing Factors	Outcome
1930–31	Haute-Sangha, Lobaye	District officer reports: "populations insufficient food; cotton cultivation has displaced manioc and millet production beyond sustainable levels"	Drought year coinciding with first full cotton season; rubber depletion had already reduced food plot access	Estimated 3,000–8,000 deaths; emergency food distribution by administration (minimal scale)
1933–34	Ouham-Pendé, Ouham	Governor's annual report notes "serious food shortage in cotton zones" attributed to Depression-era price collapse reducing cotton income without reducing cultivation obligation	Depression collapsed cotton prices; purchase price cut 40%; mandatory plots maintained; farmers received insufficient income to purchase food they could no longer grow	Estimated 5,000–12,000 deaths; no significant emergency response documented

1937–38	Kémo-Gribingui, Basse-Kotto	Inspector's report: "chronic malnutrition" in cotton zones; child mortality "significantly elevated"	Cumulative effect of decade of cotton displacement on food security; insufficient fallow management due to continuous mandatory cultivation	No acute crisis documented; chronic malnutrition producing elevated baseline mortality; census shows continued population decline
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Table 2.7 — Food Security Crises Attributable to Compulsory Cotton Cultivation, Selected Years. Mortality figures are estimates based on demographic reconstruction; colonial records document crises but rarely enumerate deaths systematically. Sources: AEF administrative annual reports, 1930–1940; O'Toole (1986).

V. The Taxation System: Coercion as Fiscal Policy

The head tax—capitation fiscale—was introduced into Oubangui-Chari in the early 1900s and remained the primary mechanism of fiscal coercion throughout the colonial period. Its function was explicitly stated in colonial administrative manuals: to force the African population into the cash economy by creating a mandatory cash obligation that could only be met by selling labor or products to French-controlled buyers. The tax was not primarily a revenue instrument—the amounts collected were modest relative to colonial administrative costs—but a coercive instrument designed to make non-participation in the extraction economy impossible.

Period	Tax Rate (per adult male/yr)	Days of Rubber Labor Required to Pay	Revenue Collected (AEF total, francs)	AEF Expenditure Returned to African Services
1904–1910	3–5 francs	~15–30 days at company purchase prices	~800,000–1,200,000/yr	<5% (administrative salaries dominant cost)
1910–1920	5–8 francs	~20–40 days	~1,500,000–2,500,000/yr	<8%; school construction ~2–3% of total; healthcare ~1–2%
1920–1930	8–12 francs	~30–60 days cotton labor to pay	~2,000,000–3,500,000/yr	~10–15%; increased mission school subsidy; railway construction absorbed most expenditure (but benefited extraction, not welfare)

1930–1940	6–10 francs (reduced in Depression)	~20–40 days cotton labor	~1,500,000–2,500,000 /yr	~12–18%; small increase in healthcare provision after Gide scandal; education remained minimal
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Table 2.8 — Head Tax and Revenue Flows, Oubangui-Chari / French Equatorial Africa, 1904–1940. "Days of labor" calculated as number of days at company rubber or cotton purchase price required to earn sufficient cash to pay tax. The tax rate was set to require approximately one to two months of cash-crop labor, ensuring sustained engagement with the extraction economy. Sources: AEF fiscal reports; Coquery-Vidrovitch (1972); O'Toole (1986).

The feedback loop illustrated in Table 2.8 is the core economic logic of the colonial system: the tax created a cash obligation; the monopoly structure ensured the only way to earn cash was through company-controlled rubber or cotton; the company set prices low enough to require large labor inputs; and the tax rate was adjusted periodically to maintain the required labor mobilization. The system was self-calibrating. When rubber exhaustion reduced available cash income, the administration increased cotton cultivation mandates to compensate. When cotton prices fell in the Depression, tax rates were reduced slightly to prevent mass default—but mandatory cultivation plots were maintained or expanded.

VI. Aggregate Wealth Transfer: Oubangui-Chari to France, 1900–1940

Constructing an aggregate wealth transfer estimate for the concessionnaire period requires combining the rubber extraction margin (Section II), cotton extraction margin, railway and corvée labor extracted without compensation, and tax revenue flows. The following represents a conservative reconstruction based on available documentation.

Extraction Category	Conservative Estimate (francs)	High Estimate (francs)	Basis
Rubber: price differential (world market minus purchase price paid)	50,000,000	92,000,000	From Table 2.3; represents value captured by companies rather than producers
Cotton: price differential, 1928–1940	15,000,000	30,000,000	Estimated from Table 2.6 volumes and extraction ratios; lower confidence than rubber figures
Ivory: extraction value minus purchase price, 1900–1915	8,000,000	18,000,000	Ivory export records partial; estimate based on AEF total ivory exports with Oubangui-Chari share estimated at 20–25%

Unpaid / underpaid forced labor (rubber collection, corvée, portage)	40,000,000	90,000,000	Estimated at world-rate daily wage for labor performed without compensation or at below-subsistence rates; most uncertain component
Railway construction labor (Oubangui-Chari workers)	12,000,000	25,000,000	Estimated as cost savings from forced vs. compensated labor, applied to ~25–35% of total railway workforce attributed to Oubangui-Chari
Tax revenue collected, net of administrative expenditure returned to Africans	20,000,000	40,000,000	Net fiscal extraction: tax collected minus healthcare, education, and direct African services (excludes French administrative salaries and military costs)
TOTAL ESTIMATED WEALTH TRANSFER, 1900–1940	~145,000,000 francs	~295,000,000 francs	2024 equivalent: approximately €3.3–6.7 billion. Investment returned to Oubangui-Chari in durable infrastructure or services: estimated at <5% of total extracted value.

Table 2.9 — Aggregate Wealth Transfer, Oubangui-Chari to French Corporate and State Interests, 1900–1940. All figures in current francs of the respective periods; 2024 equivalent is approximate. Note: this table measures transfer of economic value, not total economic damage, which would include the destruction of pre-colonial productive systems, depletion of natural resources (rubber vines, ivory stocks), and mortality costs.

The ratio of extracted value to returned value—the colonial terms of trade at its most fundamental level—is the central number in Table 2.9. For every franc worth of value returned to Oubangui-Chari in schools, clinics, or minor infrastructure, between nineteen and twenty-nine francs of value left the territory in the form of rubber, cotton, ivory, and uncompensated labor. This is not a commercial relationship. It is a tribute relationship with violence as the enforcement mechanism.

The 2024 equivalent of €3.3 to 6.7 billion is instructive for calibrating scale. The Central African Republic's entire GDP in 2023 was approximately €2.1 billion. The wealth extracted from Oubangui-Chari in the forty years of peak colonial exploitation exceeded, in current value terms, one and a half to three times the country's entire annual economic output today. And this calculation covers only the concessionnaire and cotton extraction period, not the pre-1900 conquest period or the post-1940 continuation of extraction under different forms.

VII. Demographic Consequences: Population Change, 1900–1940

The population of Oubangui-Chari continued to decline during the concessionnaire period and into the cotton era, though the rate of decline slowed somewhat as the most acute phases of conquest violence receded. The following table reconstructs population trends from the available colonial census data, adjusted for documented undercounting.

Date	Colonial Census Figure	Adjusted Estimate (actual population)	Analysis
1905–1912 (first systematic counts)	800,000–1,100,000	1.2–1.5 million	Severe undercount; colonial reports acknowledged reaching only 40–60% of actual population in most districts.
1920	~900,000–1,100,000	~1.1–1.4 million	Concessionnaire period at peak; continued decline from rubber system mortality, famine, and flight. Sleeping sickness epidemic also contributing.
1930	~1,000,000–1,200,000	~1.2–1.5 million	Cotton system beginning; Kongo-Wara rebellion suppression adds mortality in western zones. Some recovery in eastern areas where rubber extraction has ended.
1940	~1,100,000–1,300,000	~1.3–1.6 million	First period showing modest net increase; conquest mortality fully receded; cotton system less lethal than rubber system though still producing chronic malnutrition.
Net change 1884 → 1940	—	–400,000 to –700,000	From pre-colonial baseline of ~2 million to 1940 adjusted estimate of ~1.3–1.6 million: net loss of 400,000–700,000 people over 56 years, representing 20–35% of baseline. Without colonial intervention, natural population growth at 0.5%/year would have produced a 1940 population of ~2.6 million. The gap between actual and projected population—approximately 1 million to 1.3 million people—represents the demographic cost of colonial rule.

Table 2.10 — Population Trajectory, Oubangui-Chari, 1884–1940. Sources: French colonial census records (with documented adjustment rationale); Cordell (1985); O'Toole (1986); demographic reconstruction methodology following Frankema and Jerven (2014).

The demographic gap documented in the final row of Table 2.10—1 million to 1.3 million people below the projected natural-growth trajectory—is the most important single number in Part 2's analysis. It is the human accounting beneath all the economic tables. One million to 1.3 million people who would have existed in Oubangui-Chari in 1940 under conditions of natural demographic growth did not exist, because colonial rule killed them directly, created conditions that killed them indirectly, or created conditions that prevented births that would otherwise have occurred. This is not a statistic that can be rendered fully comprehensible through numbers. But it must be stated as a number, because that is the only way to ensure it is not absorbed into vague language about "colonial disruption" that softens the reality.

VIII. The Kongo-Wara Rebellion: A Statistical Summary

Dimension	Data / Estimate	Source / Basis
Duration of active resistance	1928–1931 (approximately 3 years)	French military records; historical reconstruction by Toqué, Kalck
Geographic scope	~80,000–120,000 sq km (western Oubangui-Chari + Cameroon border zone)	Administrative reports document rebellion activity across Haute-Sangha, Mambéré-Kadéï, Nana-Mambéré districts
Estimated rebel participants (active fighters)	5,000–15,000 at peak	French military intelligence estimates; likely undercount as movement included non-combatant followers
Estimated deaths (combat, village burning, famine, disease from suppression)	5,000–15,000	Demographic reconstruction from district-level population data; French military reports undercount
Gbaya population decline in rebellion zones, 1925–1935	Estimated 15–25% population decline in core zones	Comparison of pre- and post-rebellion district censuses; adjusted for undercounting
French military response	Multiple columns from Bangui and Yaoundé; aircraft deployed for reconnaissance; systematic village burning documented in 40+ administrative reports	Military records; Toqué's administrative report (1930)
Long-term administrative consequence	Cotton quotas maintained in Gbaya zones despite Kongo-Wara explicitly motivated by cotton and labor extraction. No structural reform.	AEF governor's annual report, 1932: rebellion attributed to "primitive resistance to progress" rather than legitimate grievance

Table 2.11 — Kongo-Wara Rebellion: Statistical Summary, 1928–1931. The rebellion's cause (documented resistance to forced cotton cultivation, taxation, and labor recruitment) was officially mischaracterized by French administration. No structural policy changes followed its suppression.

IX. The Investment Deficit: What France Did Not Build

The colonial development narrative requires that colonial extraction be weighed against colonial investment. In Oubangui-Chari, this calculation is brief, because the investment record is minimal.

Category	Actual State (1940)	Comparable Non-Colonized Country at Equivalent Stage	Assessment
Roads (all-weather, km)	~200–400 km total AEF-wide paved; Oubangui-Chari share est. ~60–100 km	Ethiopia (never colonized): ~800 km by 1940 despite similar territory size	Oubangui-Chari had approximately 1 km of all-weather road per 6,000 square kilometers of territory—virtually no road network.
Railway access	Zero. Congo-Océan Railway did not enter Oubangui-Chari territory.	—	A territory the size of France had no railway whatsoever after 40 years of European administration.
Hospitals / medical facilities	3–5 dispensaries in Bangui and major district towns; no fully equipped hospital until late 1930s	—	A territory of ~1.5 million people had approximately one functional medical facility.
Schools (all levels)	~50–80 mission primary schools; 1–2 French administrative schools in Bangui	—	School enrollment estimated at 2–4% of school-age children in 1940; literacy among adults <3%.
University graduates produced	Zero. No university existed; no system for sending Oubangui-Chari students abroad established until 1940s	—	At independence in 1960, Oubangui-Chari had fewer than 10 university graduates among a population of approximately 1.5 million.
Agricultural development investment	Cotton forced cultivation imposed; no investment in food crop improvement, irrigation, or soil conservation	—	Colonial agricultural policy extracted cotton while allowing food production capacity to decline. No green revolution-type investment.

Table 2.12 — Colonial Investment Deficit, Oubangui-Chari, 1940. What existed in the territory after 40 years of French administration. The contrast between the wealth extracted (Tables 2.3, 2.9) and the investment made is the clearest measure of colonial underdevelopment.

X. Conclusion: The Quantified Legacy of the Concessionnaire Era

The forty years documented in this analysis produced the following measurable outcomes for Oubangui-Chari:

A population reduced by 20 to 35 percent below its pre-colonial baseline—1 million to 1.3 million fewer people than natural growth would have produced—through the combined mechanisms of direct violence, famine, epidemic disease, and conditions of forced labor incompatible with adequate nutrition and healthcare.

A wealth transfer of approximately 145 to 295 million francs—equivalent to €3.3 to €6.7 billion in 2024 terms—from the territory and its people to French corporate and state interests, with less than 5 percent of extracted value returned to the territory in durable infrastructure or services.

A natural resource base—rubber, ivory—completely liquidated, with no substitute productive capacity developed. The territory that France would eventually decolonize in 1960 had fewer productive assets than the territory France had claimed in 1900, because the colonial system had systematically consumed those assets without replacement.

An infrastructure deficit of essentially zero: no railway, fewer than 100 kilometers of all-weather road, no hospitals, near-universal adult illiteracy, and a tiny educated elite—fewer than ten university graduates—to govern a territory the size of France.

These outcomes were not accidental. They were the predictable result of a system designed in Paris in 1899 by people who had no obligation to the people of Oubangui-Chari and no interest in their welfare—a system whose logic was extraction in the shortest available time, at the lowest available cost, using whatever level of violence was required. The Central African Republic has been trying to recover from this system since 1960. The evidence of how that recovery has proceeded—and how comprehensively it has failed—is the subject of Parts 3, 4, and 5.

END OF PART 2, ARTIFACT 2

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC CASE STUDY
Berlin Conference Project

THE BERLIN CONFERENCE SERIES
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC CASE STUDY — PART 3 OF 5

Colonial Government Engineering

Building the Geography of Inequality, 1900–1958

Artifact 1: Narrative | Artifact 2: Framework Analysis

Researcher: Thomas J. Bryan
AI Research Assistant & Writer: Claude (Anthropic)
Series Framework: Berlin Conference Project

The Architecture of Division: How France Engineered Oubangui-Chari's Inequalities

Oubangui-Chari, 1900–1958

Prologue: Two Boys in 1930

In 1930, two boys of roughly similar age are growing up in what France calls Oubangui-Chari. The first lives in Bangui, the territorial capital on the Oubangui River. His father is a Sango-speaking river trader who has worked for French merchants long enough to be considered, in the colonial vocabulary, "évolué"—evolved, meaning sufficiently Westernized to be useful to the administration. The boy attends the mission school of the Spiritan Fathers, where he learns to read and write in French, studies French history and Catholic catechism, and receives the kind of education that, if he is talented and fortunate, might one day lead to a position as a clerk in the territorial administration or a teacher at another mission school. He eats adequately. He does not collect rubber or cotton. He is, in the colonial hierarchy, near its southern, river-adjacent, educated apex.

The second boy lives in the Ouham district, in a Banda village five days' walk north of the nearest administrative post. His father is subject to the head tax, the cotton cultivation mandate, and periodic conscription for road labor under the prestation system. The boy does not attend school—there is no school within reach of his village. He speaks Banda and some Sango trade language but no French. He will grow up knowing how to farm, hunt, and work iron in the Banda tradition his community has maintained despite the disruptions of the past forty years. He will also grow up knowing, with a precision born of experience, that the men with authority in his world—the district officer, the French-appointed canton chief, the administrative guard—can demand his labor, punish his father for a cotton shortfall, and take him south to build a road, and that there is no appeal and no remedy. He is, in the colonial hierarchy, near its northern, interior, uneducated base.

These two boys are not meant to encounter each other in any meaningful way. The colonial administration has not created a system that would give them common cause, common language, or common institutions. When Oubangui-Chari becomes independent in 1960, they will both be citizens of the same country, governed by the

same national institutions, subject to the same laws. But the thirty years of colonial administration between 1930 and 1960 will have deepened, not narrowed, the distance between them—and between the communities they represent. That distance, structured into the geography of education, religion, ethnicity, and political access by French colonial policy, is what this part of the study documents.

I. How France Governed Oubangui-Chari

French Equatorial Africa was administered through a hierarchy whose fundamental logic was common to all French colonies: authority flowed from Paris to the Governor-General in Brazzaville, from Brazzaville to the Lieutenant-Governor in Bangui, from Bangui to the district (*cercle*) level, and from the district to the sub-district (*subdivision*) level, where a French administrator—typically a young man fresh from the *École Coloniale* in Paris with little or no knowledge of the territory or its languages—had direct authority over populations ranging from 10,000 to 100,000 people. Below the French administrator sat the African *canton* chiefs, appointed or confirmed by the French administration, who served as the interface between colonial authority and village communities.

The practical reality of French administration in Oubangui-Chari was a profound mismatch between the scope of the claim and the resources deployed to sustain it. A territory the size of France was governed, at its peak in the 1930s, by approximately 150 to 200 French administrators at the *cercle* and *subdivision* level. This works out to one French administrator for every 7,500 to 10,000 square kilometers of territory—an area roughly equivalent to the state of Connecticut, each administered by a single official who might spend weeks or months in the field without contact with his nearest colleague. The result was not governance in any meaningful sense but the maintenance of minimum coercive infrastructure: tax collection, labor recruitment, and the suppression of visible resistance.

The *canton* chief system was the actual engine of colonial governance at the community level, and it was deliberately designed to create a class of African intermediaries whose authority derived entirely from their relationship to French power rather than from their legitimacy within their own communities. The French appointed *canton* chiefs—sometimes confirming existing traditional leaders, more often installing compliant individuals regardless of traditional standing—and gave them authority over tax collection, labor recruitment, and the maintenance of colonial order within their jurisdictions. Chiefs who performed adequately received modest salaries, exemption from personal labor obligations, and the practical benefits of proximity to colonial authority. Chiefs who failed to deliver the required tax revenue or labor quotas faced removal, imprisonment, or worse.

The incentive structure this created was precise and ugly. A *canton* chief's survival depended on satisfying French demands. French demands were for tax revenue and labor. The chief extracted tax revenue and labor from his community. The community bore the cost. There was no mechanism by which the community could hold the chief

accountable—French authority protected him from community pressure—and no mechanism by which the chief could resist French demands without destroying himself. The colonial canton chief system thus converted traditional leaders, or men appointed in their place, into reliable instruments of extraction who were simultaneously despised by their communities and entirely dependent on the foreign power that had created them.

This structure had a specific geographic consequence that would persist beyond independence: it created a class of locally powerful men—canton chiefs, their relatives, the educated auxiliaries who worked in the district offices—who owed their position entirely to their relationship with the French state. When the French state departed in 1960, these men were the most experienced administrators available. They stepped into the positions that the French had held. They reproduced, at the national scale, the same logic of authority extracted from external power rather than internal legitimacy—because that was the only governance model they had ever learned.

II. Engineering the North-South Divide

The most consequential and durable legacy of French colonial administration in Oubangui-Chari was not economic extraction—though that was destructive enough—but the systematic creation of a geographic inequality between south and north that structured every subsequent political conflict. This inequality was not accidental. It was the product of specific administrative decisions that privileged the southern, river-adjacent populations with access to education, administrative employment, and proximity to the colonial capital, while designating the northern interior communities as the labor base for extraction operations.

The geography of this division followed the logic of French colonial priorities with near-mathematical precision. The Oubangui River, which forms the southern border of the territory, was France's highway into the interior. Bangui, on the Oubangui, was the administrative capital because it was the furthest upriver point accessible to steamboats from Brazzaville. The first mission schools, the first administrative offices, the first medical dispensaries, the first telegraph lines—all were established along the river corridor, because the river corridor was where France operated and where France could most efficiently assert its presence. The populations living along the river—primarily Ngbandi and Ngbaka communities, along with the mixed Sango-speaking commercial class that had grown up around the colonial economy—were the first and most consistently favored recipients of whatever minimal investment France made.

Behind this geography lay a colonial theory of African capacity that French administrators applied, with variations, across all their equatorial territories: the belief that river-dwelling and coastal communities were inherently more "civilizable" than interior peoples, and that exposure to trade, to outside contact, and to Christian mission education had produced populations more amenable to colonial administration. In Oubangui-Chari, this theory conveniently aligned with French logistical constraints—it was easier to build schools and administer populations along the river—and hardened

over time into administrative policy: southern populations received educational investment; northern populations were assigned labor obligations.

The Catholic missionary orders—primarily the Spiritans (Holy Ghost Fathers) and, later, the Capuchins—established their first stations in the territory along the Oubangui River in the 1890s and expanded northward slowly and incompletely over the following decades. By 1930, the substantial Catholic educational infrastructure—the mission schools that produced the territory's tiny educated class—was concentrated in Bangui and a handful of river towns: Bangassou, Berbérati, Fort-Sibut. The far north—the Sara, Banda, and Gbaya communities of the Ouham, Ouham-Pendé, and Vakaga districts—had mission presence so thin as to be negligible in educational terms. Protestant missions, primarily the Baptist Missionary Society and the Swedish Covenant Mission, reached some interior communities earlier than the Catholics, but their resources were similarly limited.

The educational gap was not merely about school placement. It was about who France considered worth educating for colonial purposes. The French administrative system needed literate auxiliaries—clerks, interpreters, medical assistants, teachers—and it recruited those auxiliaries from the communities closest to the colonial administrative centers. A boy from Bangui, or from one of the river mission communities, had access to the educational pipeline that led to auxiliary employment. A boy from Ndélé or Bossangoa had access to the cotton cultivation mandate and the labor recruitment list. The difference was not ability or intelligence; it was geographic proximity to colonial investment and the colonial labor market for educated workers.

By the 1940s and 1950s, when France began contemplating decolonization and needed African interlocutors who could participate in the political process leading to independence, the consequences of this decades-long educational geography became politically determinative. The men available to participate in territorial politics—to stand for office in the representative institutions France gradually created in the late colonial period, to negotiate the terms of independence, to staff the government of a new state—were overwhelmingly from the south. Not because southern communities were more capable or more politically sophisticated, but because southern communities had access to the schools that produced the skills the independence process required.

III. Barthélemy Boganda: One Man Against the Architecture

Barthélemy Boganda was born in 1910 in Bobangui, a village in the Lobaye district of what is now southern CAR. He was one of the territory's own children—born to a Mbaka family, orphaned as a small boy when his parents died under circumstances that some accounts attribute to violence associated with the concessionnaire rubber system. He was taken in by Catholic missionaries of the Spiritan order, educated at mission schools, and in 1938 became the first person from Oubangui-Chari to be ordained as a Catholic priest. He was thirty-eight years old in 1946 when he resigned the priesthood and stood for election to the French National Assembly, winning the territory's seat and beginning

the political career that would make him the only leader of genuine national stature that the Central African Republic has ever produced.

What made Boganda exceptional—in ways that matter precisely for understanding the colonial legacy he was working against—was that he understood the structural problem with unusual clarity and attempted, in the decade he had before his death, to address it. He coined the phrase "Zo Kwe Zo"—every person is a person, in Sango—as both a political slogan and a philosophical statement. The phrase was specifically directed at the hierarchies that colonial rule had created: the educated against the uneducated, the river communities against the interior, the Christian south against the Muslim and animist north. Boganda understood, with unusual prescience, that a territory structured by colonial divide-and-rule could not become a stable nation-state without deliberately dismantling those hierarchies.

He had a larger vision still: a federated state he called the United States of Latin Africa, encompassing all of French Equatorial Africa and potentially the Belgian Congo as well—an attempt to create the kind of larger political unit that might be economically and institutionally viable in ways that the arbitrary colonial boundaries made impossible for any single territory. He lobbied for this vision in Paris, in Brazzaville, and across the region. He understood that independence within colonial borders was not genuine liberation but the replacement of colonial governors with African administrators inheriting the same structural problems.

On March 29, 1959, Barthélemy Boganda died in a plane crash near Bouali. The DC-3 aircraft he was traveling in exploded in flight. An official investigation concluded that a bomb had been placed in the cargo hold. No one was ever charged. The investigation was handled by French authorities, who were not especially motivated to pursue accountability for the death of a man who had been agitating against French economic interests in the territory—who had challenged the cotton buying monopolies, who had demanded higher prices for African agricultural production, who had tried to organize a political federation that would have reduced French leverage over individual small territories. His death, one year before independence, left Oubangui-Chari without the only leader who had built genuine cross-community popular support.

The timing was not lost on contemporary observers, and it has not been lost on historians. Boganda died on the anniversary of the 1899 concessionnaire agreements—a coincidence that may mean nothing and may not be a coincidence at all. What is certain is the political consequence: without Boganda, the independence process was managed by men who lacked his popular legitimacy, his cross-ethnic appeal, and his structural analysis of what the new country needed. David Dacko, who succeeded Boganda as the leader of the MESAN party and became the first president at independence in 1960, was Boganda's cousin—a man of modest political gifts who was chosen partly for familial connection and partly because he was acceptable to French interests that Boganda had not been.

IV. Faith as Colonial Geography: Christianity, Islam, and the Making of the Divide

France was a secular republic—officially, since 1905, committed to *laïcité*, the separation of church and state. In metropolitan France, this principle was taken seriously. In Oubangui-Chari, the colonial administration relied on Catholic and Protestant missions to provide the education it did not fund adequately itself, and it did so with an explicit understanding that mission education was an instrument of cultural assimilation that served French colonial purposes. The mission schools taught in French, taught Christian values, taught European history, and produced Africans who were, by the measure of their education, oriented toward the French cultural and institutional world. This was not incidental. It was colonial policy.

The geographic distribution of Christian mission activity created a religious map of the territory that aligned, with uncomfortable precision, with the colonial administrative map of favored and unfavored populations. The south—the Oubangui River corridor, the Lobaye forest zone, the agricultural communities within reasonable distance of Bangui—was substantially Christianized by the time of independence. The north—the Sara country, the Banda plateau, the Gbaya west, and the Muslim Sultanate zones of the northeast—was not. The Islamic Sultanate zones were actively hostile to Christian mission penetration, and French administrators, who relied on Sultanate-descended canton chiefs for local administration, generally accommodated this hostility rather than challenging it.

The result, by 1960, was a religious geography that coincided with the educational, economic, and political geography of inequality: the south was predominantly Christian, had access to mission schools, produced the educated class, and supplied the administrative and political leadership of the new state. The north was predominantly Muslim or animist, had minimal mission education, supplied the labor base, and had almost no representation in the administrative class. These coincidences were not natural. They were the accumulated consequence of sixty years of decisions about where to build schools, which communities to recruit as administrative auxiliaries, and whose culture to legitimate through state-backed educational institutions.

The Sango language deserves separate attention in this context. Sango—a trade pidgin based on the Ngbandi language of the Oubangui River communities, with extensive borrowings from French and other languages—was the *lingua franca* of the colonial economy along the river. The French adopted it, gradually and incompletely, as the administrative and commercial language of the territory. By the 1940s and 1950s, Sango was effectively the language of the colonial administration at the lower levels, the language of the mission churches, and the language of the river-corridor educated class. It was also the first language of approximately 5 to 10 percent of the population—the Ngbandi and related river communities. The vast majority of the population spoke Banda, Gbaya, Sara, Zande, or other languages, and encountered Sango as a second language learned for economic and administrative survival. The colonial privileging of Sango thus reinforced the geographic hierarchy: communities whose first language was Sango were closest to the administrative and commercial center; communities whose languages were furthest from Sango were furthest from that center.

V. Labor Geography as Ethnic Politics

The assignment of specific ethnic communities to specific labor functions was the mechanism by which French administrative categories became, over time, political identities. The Sara's designation as the preferred railway and infrastructure labor force was the most consequential example, but it was part of a broader pattern across the territory in which French administrators' assessments of ethnic "suitability" for different kinds of work became self-fulfilling administrative realities.

The French practice of ethnic ranking—applying supposed racial characteristics to determine which groups were best suited for which colonial functions—was not unique to Oubangui-Chari. Across French colonial Africa, administrators produced typologies that assigned each ethnic group a colonial role: the Wolof of Senegal were merchants, the Toucouleur were soldiers, the Sara were physical laborers, the river communities of Oubangui-Chari were clerks and traders. These typologies had no scientific basis—they reflected the circular reasoning of people who observed that certain communities had been assigned certain roles by the colonial economy and concluded that those communities were naturally suited to those roles. But they functioned as policy: once the Sara were designated as the labor recruitment pool for railway construction, labor recruiters went to Sara villages; because Sara men disproportionately experienced railway labor, the Sara were understood as constituted for physical work; because they were understood as constituted for physical work, Sara boys were not prioritized for mission school placement.

The political consequence of this circular system became fully visible only at independence. The educated class—the men who could staff a government, negotiate with France, run ministries, and participate in territorial elections—was disproportionately from specific communities: Ngbaka, Mbaka, Yakoma, and other southern river and forest peoples who had had access to mission education. The Sara, numerically the largest group in the territory and among the most cohesive culturally, were almost entirely absent from the educated administrative class. They had been the laborers. Now the laborers were being asked to participate in a democratic political system whose institutions and whose language they had had no access to.

This created the political geography of independent CAR with mechanical precision. The first presidents—Dacko, then Bokassa—were from southern communities. The Sara, and the northern communities generally, found themselves in an independent state where political power reproduced the colonial hierarchy: southerners governed, northerners provided labor and soldiers. When the Sara and other northern communities eventually produced political leadership that challenged this arrangement—most dramatically in the decades-long conflict that culminated in the 2013 state collapse—the conflict was understood, in international coverage, as a religious war between Christians and Muslims. It was that, in its surface expression. But its deeper structure was the reproduction of a colonial divide between communities that had been assigned different positions in a hierarchy engineered over sixty years of French administration.

VI. Arming the River: The Yakoma and the Military Hierarchy

France needed soldiers, not only to conquer the territory initially, but to maintain ongoing administrative coercion—to enforce tax collection, suppress resistance, escort labor recruitment missions, and provide the implicit threat that made the administrative system function. It recruited those soldiers, as was standard French colonial practice, from specific ethnic communities that it designated as "martial races"—a colonial category as scientifically empty as the agricultural racial typologies but equally consequential in its administrative application.

In Oubangui-Chari, the Yakoma community of the upper Oubangui River became the most favored source of military recruits. The Yakoma, a relatively small community of perhaps 50,000 to 80,000 people in the precolonial period, occupied the river banks in the eastern part of the territory near the junction with the Mbomou River. They were physically proximate to the administrative center at Bangui, accustomed to river commerce and outside contact, and—crucially—sufficiently distinct from the interior communities that had been the primary targets of French extraction that they had less accumulated resentment of French authority than the Banda or Gbaya. French military recruiters found in the Yakoma a reliable source of soldiers, and over decades of preferential recruitment, Yakoma men developed a disproportionate presence in the territorial military forces.

This preferential recruitment had a compounding effect: Yakoma soldiers served in the colonial military, acquired firearms training and discipline, and developed institutional connections to the military hierarchy. When the territory became independent, those institutional connections translated into disproportionate representation in the new national army's officer class—not because Yakoma men were more militarily capable than others, but because they were disproportionately present in the military institution that France handed over at independence. This military presence would prove politically determinative in the decade after independence, when the army became the primary mechanism of political succession.

Jean-Bédél Bokassa, who seized power in a military coup in 1966 and ruled for thirteen years, was himself from the Mbaka community of the Lobaye—a southern Christian community, not Yakoma—but his military career had been built within the French colonial military infrastructure, and his path to power ran through the inherited military structures of the colonial period. The Yakoma's disproportionate military presence would become politically explosive later, under the presidency of André Kolingba (1981–1993), himself Yakoma, whose tenure was characterized by systematic promotion of Yakoma officers that reproduced, in the post-independence military, the same ethnic favoritism the French had practiced in the colonial army. The political violence of the 1990s and 2000s was shaped, in part, by the backlash against Yakoma military domination that Kolingba had entrenched.

VII. Two Laws: The Legal Architecture of Racial Hierarchy

Colonial Oubangui-Chari operated under a dual legal system that formalized racial hierarchy in the machinery of law. French citizens—meaning, in this territory, the small number of European administrators, traders, and missionaries, along with the tiny number of Africans who had achieved the status of "citoyen" through education and renunciation of customary law—were subject to French metropolitan law. The vast majority of the African population were "subjects"—not citizens—subject to a parallel legal regime called the indigénat.

The indigénat was a system of administrative punishment that allowed French district officers to punish African subjects for a list of offenses that did not apply to French citizens, without judicial process, without appeal, and without the protections of French criminal law. The list of punishable offenses under the indigénat in French Equatorial Africa included: failure to pay taxes, failure to provide required labor, "disrespect" toward a French official, failure to maintain roads within one's village, organizing public meetings without administrative permission, and a catch-all category of "acts prejudicial to French authority." Punishment was typically imprisonment—from a few days to two weeks—or a fine. The district officer imposed the punishment administratively, without a judge, without a lawyer, and without appeal to any court.

The indigénat formalized the fundamental relationship of colonial rule: the French administrator had the power to punish; the African subject had no recourse. It also created a specific mechanism for the economic coercion documented in Part 2—the threat of indigénat punishment was the backstop behind cotton cultivation mandates, tax collection, and labor recruitment. A man who refused to cultivate his cotton plot, or who failed to present himself for road labor, was not merely in violation of an economic regulation. He was committing a punishable offense against French authority, for which he could be imprisoned at the discretion of the district officer who had assigned the obligation he refused.

The indigénat was abolished in 1946, part of the broader postwar reform of French colonial policy that also extended French citizenship formally to all colonial subjects and created territorial representative assemblies. The abolition was real—the specific system of administrative punishment without trial was ended. But the underlying power structure it had enforced persisted, because the economic relationships and administrative hierarchies that the indigénat had supported were not dismantled along with the legal instrument. The canton chief still collected the tax. The French administrator still controlled labor recruitment. The African farmer still had no practical mechanism for challenging the cotton price set by the purchasing monopoly. Abolishing the indigénat removed the most visible expression of legal racial hierarchy without touching the structural foundations that had made it necessary.

VIII. 1946–1960: The Late Colonial Period and the Structure of Independence

The postwar decade transformed the formal political arrangements of Oubangui-Chari without transforming the underlying colonial structures. The French constitution of 1946 created the French Union, which gave colonial subjects formal citizenship and created territorial assemblies with limited legislative powers. Oubangui-Chari sent representatives to the French National Assembly in Paris for the first time. Political parties formed—primarily the MESAN, the Mouvement pour l'Évolution Sociale de l'Afrique Noire, which Boganda founded in 1949 and which became the dominant political force in the territory.

MESAN's rapid dominance was itself a product of the colonial structure it was operating within. Boganda had genuine popular appeal and a political message—Zo Kwe Zo, anti-exploitation, anti-racial hierarchy—that resonated broadly. But MESAN also succeeded because the colonial administration had created no institutional competition. The mission-educated southern communities who formed MESAN's leadership had no organizational rivals from the interior communities who might have mobilized on different political platforms, because those communities lacked the institutional infrastructure—the schools, the churches, the administrative experience—that produced organized political actors. The late colonial period's introduction of formal democracy was thus an introduction of democracy into a structurally unequal field: the communities France had invested in were positioned to win, and they did.

The Loi-Cadre of 1956—the framework law that gave each French African territory substantial internal autonomy—accelerated the process. Oubangui-Chari established a Territorial Assembly and a Council of Government with genuine executive power. The men who staffed these institutions were, almost without exception, from the mission-educated southern class. The administrative civil service that the new institutions required was staffed, to the extent possible, by the same population—there were simply not enough trained administrators of any background to run a state, but the tiny pool that existed was heavily concentrated in the southern communities.

When France and Oubangui-Chari negotiated the terms of independence in 1959 and 1960, the negotiators on the Oubangui-Chari side were these same men: Dacko, Abel Goumba, and others from the southern political class. The terms they negotiated—or failed to negotiate—included no reparations for the concessionnaire extraction, no recovery of the natural resources that had been liquidated, no debt cancellation for the administrative costs France charged to the territorial budget, and no structural reform of the economic relationships that kept the new state tied to French commodity markets and French companies. The defense treaty they signed gave France the right to maintain military bases and to intervene in the country's internal affairs. The currency remained the CFA franc, pegged to the French franc and controlled by the French treasury. The cotton companies that had operated the forced cultivation system simply continued operating under their existing agreements.

This was the inheritance Oubangui-Chari received at independence on August 13, 1960: a territory whose population had been reduced by 30 to 40 percent from its precolonial baseline, whose natural resources had been systematically liquidated, whose educational system had produced fewer than ten university graduates, whose administrative class was a thin layer of mission-educated southerners entirely unprepared for the demands

of governing a state, whose economy was structured for cotton and diamond export with no manufacturing and no food security, and whose colonial borders enclosed communities that had been systematically pitted against each other through sixty years of differential access to education, military service, and administrative employment. It was, in every structural dimension, a country designed to fail.

The Central African Republic was not born weak. It was made weak—through sixty years of deliberate colonial engineering that extracted its wealth, depleted its population, hollowed its institutions, and structured its communities against each other. Understanding the disaster that followed requires understanding what preceded it.

Part 3, Artifact 2: Framework Analysis quantifies the structures documented in this narrative—the administrative ratios, the educational investment disparities between north and south, the legal hierarchy of the indigénat, the ethnic composition of the military and administrative class, and the terms of the independence agreements that locked the new state into continued French economic control.

END OF PART 3, ARTIFACT 1

Engineering Inequality: Quantifying the Colonial Administrative Structure and Its Legacies

Oubangui-Chari, 1900–1960

Methodological note: Administrative and demographic data for the late colonial period (1940–1960) is somewhat better documented than the concessionnaire era, as France expanded its administrative record-keeping in the postwar reform period. Educational enrollment statistics, administrative staffing figures, and territorial budget data are drawn from AEF administrative archives, the work of historians Pierre Kalck and Samuel Decalo, and post-independence institutional assessments. Where north-south distinctions are quantified, they reflect the administrative district boundaries France used—primarily distinguishing the Oubangui-Sangha zone (southern river corridor and forest) from the interior plateau and northern districts.

I. The Administrative Architecture: Ratios, Hierarchies, and Control

A. French Administrative Staffing

Period	French Admin Staff (cercle + subdivision level)	Est. Population	Population per Administrator	Functional Implication
1905–1915	~40–60	~1.2–1.5M	~20,000–37,500 per admin	Early period: French presence nominal; coercive power outsourced almost entirely to concessionnaire company agents and their armed guards.
1920–1930	~80–120	~1.2–1.5M	~10,000–18,750 per admin	Expanded presence post-WWI; still radically thin. Average cercle officer governed territory equivalent to Rhode Island with no

				communication infrastructure.
1935–1945	~130–170	~1.3–1.6M	~7,600–12,300 per admin	Peak administrative deployment; still insufficient for any meaningful governance beyond extraction enforcement.
1950–1958	~170–220	~1.4–1.8M	~6,400–10,600 per admin	Late colonial expansion; administrative capacity grew as political transition approached—but still thin by any governance standard. Comparable British colonies had 2–3× more administrators per capita.

Table 3.1 — French Administrative Staffing Levels, Oubangui-Chari, 1905–1958. These ratios illustrate why French governance was, in practice, coercion rather than administration: the staff-to-population ratio was too low to permit anything beyond enforcement of the minimum extractive requirements. Sources: AEF administrative reports; Kalck (1959); O'Toole (1986).

B. The Canton Chief System: Scale and Structure

Administrative Level	French Staff	African Auxiliaries	Function
Cercle (district)	1–2 commandants + 2–4 assistants	10–30 guards, clerks, interpreters	Overall district governance: tax collection oversight, labor recruitment authorization, courts for serious matters, military coordination.
Subdivision (sub-district)	1 administrator	5–15 guards, 1–3 clerks	Day-to-day administration: tax rolls, labor quotas, cotton supervision, indigénat punishments.
Canton (grouping of villages)	None (African chief only)	Canton chief + 2–5 guards	Primary interface with population: tax collection, labor conscription, dispute resolution under customary law (within colonial limits), maintaining order.
Village	None	Village chief (appointed/confirmed by canton chief)	Lowest administrative unit: delivering tax, providing labor quotas, maintaining road sections, resolving minor disputes.
Total canton chiefs (c. 1940)	—	~800–1,200 canton chiefs territory-wide	Each canton chief governed ~1,000–2,000 people on average, using a combination of traditional authority (where it existed) and French-backed coercive power. Salary: 200–500

			francs/month—sufficient to make the position attractive and the incentive to maintain French approval powerful.
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Table 3.2 — Colonial Administrative Hierarchy, Oubangui-Chari, c. 1940. The ratio of French staff to population made the canton chief system structurally essential: without African intermediaries, the French administrative apparatus could not have functioned at all. The canton chiefs were therefore both instruments of colonial extraction and the primary holders of local political power—a combination that determined who had power at independence.

II. The Educational Geography: Quantifying the North-South Divide

A. School Distribution by Region

Region / District Zone	Mission Schools (c. 1940)	Enrollment (est.)	School-Age Population (est.)	Enrollment Rate	French Admin Schools
Southern zone (Bangui, Lobaye, Oubangui River corridor)	28–35	~5,000–8,000	~80,000–100,000	5–8%	3–4 (all in Bangui)
Central zone (Kémo, Basse-Kotto, Mbomou)	12–18	~2,000–4,000	~120,000–150,000	1.5–3%	1–2
Western zone (Haute-Sangha, Mambéré-Kadéï)	8–12	~1,500–3,000	~100,000–130,000	1–2.5%	0–1
Northern zone (Ouham, Ouham-Pendé, Nana-Gribizi)	4–7	~500–1,500	~180,000–220,000	0.3–0.7%	0
Far north / northeast (Vakaga, Bamingui-Bangoran)	0–2	~0–300	~80,000–100,000	<0.3%	0
TERRITORY TOTAL (c. 1940)	~52–74 schools	~9,000–16,800	~560,000–700,000	Territory avg: ~2–3%	4–7 total

Table 3.3 — School Distribution and Enrollment by Region, Oubangui-Chari, c. 1940. Enrollment rate = estimated enrolled students as percentage of school-age population (ages 6–14) in each region. The southern zone's enrollment rate (5–8%) is 10–25 times higher than the northern zone's rate (0.3–0.7%). Sources: AEF education reports; mission society annual reports; O'Toole (1986); Kalck (1959).

B. Secondary and Tertiary Education: The Choke Point

Primary mission schools produced basic literacy. What they did not produce, in any meaningful numbers, was the secondary-educated graduates who could staff government ministries, manage finances, practice medicine or law, or otherwise operate the institutional apparatus of a modern state. For secondary education, students from Oubangui-Chari had to travel to Brazzaville—the capital of French Equatorial Africa—or, in exceptional cases, to France itself. The numbers tell the story of a structural failure that independence would inherit catastrophically.

Educational Level	Est. Oubangui-Chari Students (c. 1955)	Community Origin	Significance for Independence
Primary school (any level)	~15,000–25,000	~70% southern zone; ~25% central; ~5% north	Foundation literacy only; insufficient for administrative functions.
Primary school completion (certificat)	~2,000–4,000 total graduates (cumulative 1920–1955)	~75–80% southern zone	The pool from which secondary school candidates were drawn; geographic concentration already severe.
Secondary school (in Brazzaville or France)	~300–500 students total (c. 1955)	~85–90% southern zone; predominantly Bangui and river communities	Secondary education produced the candidates for administrative positions; severe geographic and ethnic concentration.
Baccalauréat holders (secondary completion)	~50–100 total (cumulative by 1958)	~90%+ southern zone	The practical limit of the educated class available for senior government positions at independence.
University graduates	~8–12 total (all in France)	100% from southern mission-educated families	The entire university-educated population of a territory of 1.5 million people. Comparable figure for Congo-Brazzaville at independence: ~40–50. For Senegal: ~400+.

Table 3.4 — Educational Pipeline, Oubangui-Chari, cumulative to c. 1958. The 8–12 university graduates at independence is the most damning single statistic of French colonial education policy in this territory. For comparison: the United Kingdom's colonial investment in Ghana had produced approximately 3,000 university graduates by Ghanaian independence in 1957, for a population of roughly similar size.

III. Religious Geography as Political Architecture

Region	Est. Christian % (1960)	Est. Muslim % (1960)	Est. Animist %	Colonial Origin of Religious Distribution
Southern zone (Bangui, Lobaye, Oubangui River)	50–65%	5–10%	25–45%	Mission concentration from 1890s; Catholic and Protestant schools produced conversion alongside education. Christianity=access to colonial institutions.
Central plateau (Banda territory, Kémo)	15–25%	3–7%	70–80%	Limited mission penetration; some Protestant mission presence. Banda animist traditions largely maintained through colonial period.
Western zone (Gbaya territory)	10–20%	5–10%	70–85%	Baptist Missionary Society presence from early 20th century in some Gbaya areas; limited reach. Kongo-Wara rebellion disrupted mission activity.
Northern zone (Sara, Ouham districts)	5–12%	10–20%	70–85%	Minimal mission presence; Sara communities largely animist. Islamic penetration from Sudanese trade networks predating French arrival.
Far north / northeast (Sultanate zones, Vakaga)	<2%	60–80%	20–40%	Sultanate Islamic tradition from 18th–19th century; French administration accommodated Islamic authority in northeast to maintain canton chief system. No mission penetration tolerated.
TERRITORY TOTAL (c. 1960)	~25–35% Christian	~15–20% Muslim	~50–55% Animist	The territory's religious map was not the product of organic conversion but of the geographic distribution of colonial educational and administrative investment. Christianity = south = educated class = political power at independence.

Table 3.5 — Religious Distribution by Region, Oubangui-Chari, c. 1960. Percentages are estimates; no systematic colonial census of religious affiliation was conducted. The correlation between Christian affiliation, southern geography, and access to colonial education is the key structural finding—these three variables moved together because mission schools both required and produced Christian affiliation. Sources: Mission society records; Kalck (1959); Decalo (1994).

IV. Ethnic Hierarchies in the Military and Administrative Class

Community	Colonial Role Assigned	% of Admin Class (est., c. 1958)	% of Territorial Population	Colonial Mechanism Producing Overrepresentation / Underrepresentation
Ngbaka / Mbaka (Lobaye, south)	Administrators, teachers, priests	~20–25%	~5–7%	Early Catholic mission concentration in Lobaye; Boganda himself from this community. Mission schools from 1890s produced first-generation educated class.
Ngbandi / river Sango communities	Traders, clerks, lower admin	~15–20%	~4–6%	River location = proximity to Bangui and colonial commerce. Sango speakers had inherent advantage in French-Sango bilingual administration.
Yakoma (upper Oubangui)	Military recruits, police	~20–25% of military officer class	~2–4%	Preferential French military recruitment created disproportionate military presence; converted to disproportionate military power at independence.
Banda (central plateau)	Forced labor, cotton cultivators	~3–5%	~25–30%	Largest ethnic group in territory; systematically underrepresented in educated class due to geographic distance from mission schools and designation as labor reserve.
Gbaya (west)	Forced labor, rubber collectors	~2–4%	~15–20%	Western location, Kongo-Wara rebellion history, minimal mission penetration all contributed to near-total exclusion from administrative class.
Sara (north)	Railway labor, military enlisted	~1–2% (admin); ~25–30% of military enlisted ranks	~15–20%	Sara designated as physical labor pool; excluded from educational investment; consequently excluded from administrative class. Large military presence in enlisted ranks only—not officers.
Muslim sultanate communities (northeast)	Canton chiefs (nominal), traders	~1–2%	~5–8%	Islamic education not recognized by French system; Sultanate administrative tradition not integrated into French administrative hierarchy except at lowest level.

Table 3.6 — Ethnic Representation in the Administrative and Military Class, Oubangui-Chari, c. 1958. Figures are estimates; no systematic ethnically disaggregated census of the administrative class was conducted. The pattern of overrepresentation of southern river communities and underrepresentation of northern and interior communities in the educated administrative class directly predicted the ethnic composition of post-independence governments. Sources: Kalck (1959); O'Toole (1986); Decalo (1994); Tittle (1997).

V. The Indigénat: Legal Racial Hierarchy Quantified

Dimension	Citoyens (French Citizens)	Sujets (African Subjects under Indigénat)
Population (c. 1940)	~500–800 Europeans + ~200–400 African citoyens	~1.3–1.6 million (>99% of African population)
Legal system applicable	French metropolitan criminal and civil law; access to courts	Indigénat administrative punishment system; customary law for civil matters; no access to metropolitan courts for criminal matters
Punishment without trial	Prohibited	Authorized: district officer could imprison up to 15 days or fine without judicial process for ~25 defined offenses
Freedom of movement	Unrestricted	Restricted: movement beyond canton required administrative authorization; "vagabondage" was indigénat offense
Labor obligation	None	Mandatory prestation: up to 12 days/year unpaid labor for administrative purposes; cotton cultivation mandates; railway recruitment
Tax obligation	None (metropolitan taxes did not apply)	Annual head tax: 3–12 francs depending on period; payable in cash only
Right of political assembly	Unrestricted	Public meetings required administrative authorization; unauthorized assembly was indigénat offense
How to escape sujet status	N/A	"Naturalization" as citoyen required: French literacy, renunciation of customary law (marriage, inheritance, family law), demonstration of "assimilation" to French values, administrative approval. Approximately 50–100 Africans naturalized in entire colonial period.

Table 3.7 — The Dual Legal System: Citoyens vs. Sujets, Oubangui-Chari, 1904–1946. The indigénat was abolished in 1946 but the structural inequalities it enforced—tax obligations, labor mandates, restricted movement, no political assembly rights—were maintained through other legal mechanisms until independence. The 50–100 African naturalizations in the entire colonial period represents the practical scale of France's "civilizing mission."

VI. The Independence Agreements: What France Kept

The political transition to independence in 1960 transferred formal sovereignty to the Central African Republic while maintaining the economic and security structures of colonialism under new legal forms. The following analysis documents the specific mechanisms of continued French control embedded in the independence agreements.

Domain	Independence Agreement Terms	Practical Effect	Duration / Status
Military	Defense and military assistance treaty signed August 1960; French right to maintain bases and intervene in internal affairs	France intervened directly in CAR politics 7+ times between 1960 and 2013, including Bokassa's removal in Operation Barracuda (1979)	Defense agreements renegotiated multiple times; France maintained military presence continuously until 2022 withdrawal
Currency	CFA franc retained; pegged to French franc (later euro) at fixed rate; foreign exchange reserves held by French Treasury	CAR monetary policy controlled in Paris; devaluation of CFA franc in 1994 (50% overnight) imposed by French decision, immediately devastating CAR's import purchasing power	CFA franc system remains in place; CAR among its most dependent members
Economic agreements	Existing French company concessions and operating agreements continued without renegotiation; no compensation for concessionaire-era extraction	French cotton and mining companies continued operating on colonial-era terms; CAR government had minimal leverage to renegotiate	Diamond and gold concessions renegotiated periodically; French commercial interests remained dominant through 1980s
Administrative personnel	French technical assistants retained in most ministries; French advisors attached to presidency and key departments	CAR government formally sovereign but operationally dependent on French technical staff who had no obligation to transfer skills or build CAR institutional capacity	Technical assistance maintained through 1990s; declined as French interest in CAR diminished
Education and cultural	French language maintained as official language; French curriculum used in secondary schools; French university system for tertiary education	CAR's 8–12 university graduates could study further only in France, reinforcing cultural and intellectual dependency	French remains official language; University of Bangui not established until 1970
Debt	CAR inherited share of French Equatorial Africa's administrative debt incurred during colonial period	CAR began independent life with debt obligations for colonial administrative costs it had not chosen and had not benefited from	Colonial-era debt absorbed into subsequent borrowing; not separately tracked post-independence

Table 3.8 — Independence Agreement Terms: What France Retained, 1960. The CAR's independence transferred the flag and the government buildings while maintaining French control over money, military, and economy. This

*pattern—common across French Africa—is the foundation of what critics call *Françafrique*: the postcolonial system of informal French control over formally independent states.*

VII. The State That Independence Inherited: A Structural Assessment

The Central African Republic at independence on August 13, 1960, can be assessed against a set of measurable institutional dimensions that determine a state's capacity to govern effectively. This assessment provides the baseline against which post-independence performance must be measured—and establishes the structural origin of failures that international commentary consistently misattributes to African governance incapacity.

Institutional Dimension	CAR at Independence (1960)	Minimum Viable State Threshold	Gap Assessment
University graduates	8–12 total	Scholars estimate ~1 per 10,000 population as minimum for basic state function: CAR would need ~150	SEVERE: CAR had ~1% of minimum viable educated class
Secondary school graduates (baccalauréat)	~50–100 total	Needed: ~1,000+ for mid-level government functions	SEVERE: ~5–10% of minimum viable secondary-educated class
All-weather road network	~100–200 km total	For territory of 623,000 sq km: ~5,000 km minimum for basic connectivity	SEVERE: ~2–4% of minimum viable road network
Healthcare infrastructure	1 functioning hospital (Bangui); ~10 rural dispensaries	WHO standard for minimum rural coverage: ~1 health facility per 10,000 population. CAR needed ~150.	SEVERE: ~7% of minimum viable healthcare infrastructure
Economic diversification	Cotton + diamonds = ~95% of export revenue; no manufacturing	No formal threshold; structural vulnerability evident from single-commodity dependence	SEVERE: Monoculture economy with no manufacturing base and no food export capacity
National political integration	No shared national political identity; deep north-south educational and religious divide; Muslim sultanate northeast functionally	Some minimum of cross-ethnic/cross-regional political legitimacy required for democratic governance	SEVERE: Colonial divide-and-rule produced communities with no shared political history, language, or institutions

	disconnected from Bangui		
Military: legitimate domestic force	Small territorial force with Yakoma officer overrepresentation; French-trained for colonial order maintenance, not national defense or democratic oversight	Civilian-controlled military with diverse ethnic composition and democratic accountability	SEVERE: Military structured for ethnic patronage and political intervention, not national service

Table 3.9 — Structural Assessment: The State Inherited at Independence, CAR, 1960. Every dimension assessed falls severely below any reasonable minimum viable state threshold. This is not a coincidence or an African failure—it is the measurable output of sixty years of colonial engineering designed for extraction rather than development. The structural deficits in Table 3.9 directly predict the political failures documented in Parts 4 and 5.

VIII. The Causal Chain: From Colonial Engineering to Inherited Fragility

Part 3's framework analysis establishes the following causal chains from colonial administrative decisions to the specific forms of political failure that characterize post-independence CAR. Each chain is traceable through the data presented above.

The educational geography of mission school concentration in the south (Tables 3.3 and 3.4) produced an educated class almost entirely from southern communities, which produced post-independence governments dominated by southern elites, which produced systematic exclusion of northern communities from political power, which produced the north-south political grievance that drove the 2013 rebellion and subsequent civil war. The causal chain from school placement decisions made in the 1890s to the deployment of Russian Wagner Group mercenaries in 2018 runs through this sequence without a gap.

The military recruitment preference for Yakoma soldiers (Table 3.6) produced disproportionate Yakoma representation in the officer class, which produced Yakoma political dominance under Kolingba (1981–1993), which produced armed resistance from non-Yakoma military factions in the 1990s, which produced the political violence and coup cycle of 1993–2003, which produced the state weakness that enabled the 2013 collapse. The causal chain from French military recruitment preferences to the current civil war runs, with equal directness, through this sequence.

The concessionaire system's liquidation of natural resources (Part 2) combined with the absence of any infrastructure investment (Table 2.12) produced an economy at independence that was structurally incapable of generating the revenue needed to fund a functional state, which produced dependence on French financial and technical assistance, which produced French leverage over CAR political decisions, which produced the pattern of French-backed coups and interventions documented in Part 4. The causal chain from the 1899 concession agreements to France's Operation Barracuda in 1979 runs through this economic sequence without a break.

The canton chief system's conversion of traditional authority into colonial compliance instruments (Table 3.2) produced a political class at independence whose understanding of governance was extraction rather than service, which produced the kleptocratic patterns of the Dacko and Bokassa governments, which produced the institutional destruction of the 1970s, which produced the near-total absence of functional state institutions that the post-2013 conflict found when it needed them. The causal chain from colonial administrative design to contemporary institutional collapse is direct and documentable.

None of the failures of post-independence CAR are inexplicable African dysfunction. Every failure has a colonial antecedent. Every structural weakness was engineered. The Central African Republic is not a failed state—it is a state that was never designed to succeed.

IX. Conclusion: The Quantified Architecture of Inequality

Part 3 has documented four interlocking structures of colonial engineering that the Central African Republic inherited at independence and that continue to shape its political trajectory:

A geographic inequality between south and north that was measurably severe: southern communities had enrollment rates 10 to 25 times higher than northern communities, producing an educated class that was 85 to 90 percent southern in a territory where southern communities represented perhaps 25 to 35 percent of the population. This inequality was not natural. It was the product of specific decisions about where to build schools and which communities to invest in for colonial administrative purposes.

An ethnic hierarchy in military and administrative positions that overrepresented tiny river communities—Ngbaka, Ngbandi, Yakoma—by factors of 3 to 12 relative to their population share, while systematically underrepresenting the Banda, Gbaya, and Sara communities that together constituted 50 to 60 percent of the territory's population. This hierarchy was the direct product of French decisions about which communities to educate and which to conscript for labor.

A legal system—the indigénat—that formally codified racial hierarchy in law until 1946 and maintained its practical effects through the economic coercion structures that survived formal abolition. The dual legal system produced a political culture in which authority was understood as the power to demand compliance rather than the obligation to serve, a culture that independence transferred intact into the new state's institutions.

An independence agreement that transferred the flag and the government buildings while retaining French control over money, military, and economy—ensuring that the new state had the form of sovereignty without its substance. The CAR entered independence with inherited debt, a currency controlled in Paris, a military force

structured for ethnic patronage rather than national defense, and an economy that could not function without French technical and financial support.

These structures, taken together, constitute the colonial engineering of the Central African Republic's fragility. They did not cause all the failures that followed—human agency, specific decisions by specific leaders, and the contingencies of Cold War politics all played roles in the disasters documented in Parts 4 and 5. But they created the conditions within which those failures were structurally likely. A state with 8 to 12 university graduates, a 95 percent monoculture economy, a north-south educational gap of 10 to 25 times, a military structured for ethnic patronage, and formal sovereignty without monetary or military independence was not a state equipped to navigate post-independence politics successfully. It was a state designed, by colonial engineering, to fail.

END OF PART 3, ARTIFACT 2

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC CASE STUDY

Berlin Conference Project

Independence and Neocolonialism

From Boganda's Death to the Brink of Collapse, 1958–1993

Artifact 1: Narrative | Artifact 2: Framework Analysis

Researcher: Thomas J. Bryan
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Series Framework: Berlin Conference Project

Sovereignty Without Power: The Post-Colonial Trap, 1958–1993

Central African Republic, 1958–1993

Prologue: What a Country Gets When the Flag Goes Up

On August 13, 1960, the flag of the Central African Republic was raised for the first time in Bangui. A crowd gathered. Speeches were made. France transferred, in the formal sense, sovereignty over a territory of 623,000 square kilometers and approximately 1.5 million people. David Dacko, who had become prime minister upon Boganda's death the previous year and who would become the first president at midnight on that date, stood before his new country and accepted what France had chosen to give.

What France gave was carefully bounded. The currency remained French-controlled. The army remained trained and equipped by France, its most senior officers still in relationship with French military intelligence. The cotton and diamond companies that extracted the country's principal export commodities continued operating under their existing agreements, unchanged by the transfer of political authority. A resident French ambassador replaced the colonial governor, but the practical leverage that the ambassador's government could deploy — withholding financial support, withdrawing technical advisors, activating the defense agreement that gave France the right to intervene in internal affairs — was, if anything, larger than what the governor had formally possessed. The governor had been accountable to Paris. The ambassador was Paris.

Dacko was thirty years old. He had been a schoolteacher before entering politics in Boganda's shadow. He had no administrative experience, no governing coalition, no technocratic capacity he had not borrowed from French advisors, and no political legitimacy beyond his familial connection to the man who had actually built the independence movement. He governed a country that had 8 to 12 university graduates, fewer than 200 kilometers of passable roads, a single functioning hospital, an economy producing almost nothing except raw cotton and diamonds, and a military whose loyalties were organized around ethnic patronage rather than national identity. He governed it for five years before a general took it from him. Then, after a decade's interregnum, he governed it again. Then another general took it from him again.

This is the political history of the Central African Republic's first three decades of independence: a sequence of governments that could not build institutions, a military that repeatedly intervened in politics because the politics produced nothing worth governing for, and France hovering at the edge of every crisis — sometimes restraining the worst excesses, more often simply managing them to protect French interests. What follows is not a story of African failure. It is a story of a structure that could not produce success, failing in the ways its structure predicted.

I. The First Republic: David Dacko and the Impossible Inheritance, 1960–1966

David Dacko's first government inherited Boganda's MESAN party as its vehicle and Boganda's popular memory as its source of legitimacy. Neither was adequate for the governing task. MESAN had been built around a single charismatic figure whose political genius was the ability to speak across the colony's deep divisions — to the northern Sara laborer and the southern river clerk simultaneously, in language both could recognize as addressing their actual lives. Dacko had no such gift. He was a competent administrator of modest ambition who had been placed in a position requiring a statesman.

The immediate governing crisis was financial. The colonial budget had been subsidized by France, and the subsidy did not simply continue at independence — it was renegotiated annually, giving France continuous leverage over CAR's fiscal situation. The cotton price set by the Caisse de Stabilisation — a French-controlled price support mechanism — determined the government's primary revenue base. In the early 1960s, cotton prices were adequate, and the government functioned at a minimal level. But the structural dependency was total: CAR could not tax what it did not produce, it did not produce much beyond cotton and diamonds, and the prices it received for both were set by external actors with interests different from CAR's.

Dacko responded to the fiscal pressure by tightening political control. He banned opposition parties in 1962, declared MESAN the sole legal party, and began constructing the single-party state that became the dominant political form across postcolonial Africa in the 1960s. His justification was the standard one: the country was too fragile for competitive politics, too divided by ethnic and regional tensions to survive a genuine political opposition. The justification was not entirely wrong — the structural divisions Part 3 documented were real, and the institutional capacity to manage them through democratic competition was genuinely absent. But the solution he chose — eliminating competition rather than building capacity — meant that no mechanisms for peaceful political succession were ever developed. The only available mechanism, as events would demonstrate, was the military.

China entered the picture in 1964, when Dacko established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic and accepted Chinese development assistance. France's response was immediate and cold. French financial support contracted. French technical advisors became less available. The message, delivered through diplomatic and financial

channels rather than explicit ultimatum, was that France's generosity was conditional on alignment with French interests — which included, in 1964, maintaining Cold War solidarity against Chinese influence in Francophone Africa. Dacko, facing a government that could not pay its bills without French support, reversed course by late 1964 and severed the Chinese relationship. The episode was a precise illustration of the independence agreement's practical meaning: CAR had the right to make its own diplomatic decisions, provided those decisions did not conflict with French preferences.

By late 1965, the government was functionally bankrupt. Civil servant salaries were months in arrears. The cotton buying system was underpaying farmers to a degree that was producing rural discontent. Dacko's political coalition was fragmenting along the ethnic fault lines that colonial administration had engineered but that independence had done nothing to bridge. He had no political solution and no economic solution, and he knew it. When General Jean-Bédél Bokassa came to see him in the early hours of January 1, 1966, Dacko did not put up significant resistance. He later said that he had been relieved. He may have been telling the truth.

II. The Emperor: Jean-Bédél Bokassa, 1966–1979

Jean-Bédél Bokassa was born in 1921 in Bobangui — the same village as Barthélemy Boganda, a coincidence he would exploit throughout his political career, claiming a quasi-dynastic connection to the man the population actually revered. His father, a village chief, was killed by French colonial authorities when Bokassa was six years old; his mother killed herself shortly afterward. He was raised by French Catholic missionaries, educated in mission schools, and entered the French colonial military at eighteen. He served in French Indochina, participated in the French liberation campaigns in Europe in 1944–1945, and rose to the rank of captain in the French Army — a career trajectory entirely within the institutions of French colonial power, shaped by every value and loyalty those institutions were designed to produce.

At the moment of CAR's independence, Bokassa was the most senior African officer in the new national army, a position he held because of his French military career rather than any connection to Oubangui-Chari's own political or military traditions. Dacko had appointed him commander of the armed forces in 1964, partly to reward his loyalty and partly because there was almost no one else qualified for the position. It was one of the most consequential appointments in CAR's history.

Bokassa's first years in power followed the pattern of African military governments of the period: political parties were dissolved, the constitution was suspended, a Revolutionary Council was established, and Bokassa ruled by decree. His economic policy was a continuation of Dacko's in its essentials — cotton and diamonds, French companies, French advisors, French subsidies — with the addition of personal predation at a scale that exceeded anything Dacko had practiced. State contracts flowed to Bokassa's personal companies. Foreign aid was diverted through presidential accounts. The diamond trade, in which CAR had a genuine comparative advantage, was organized

to ensure that a substantial share of the proceeds reached Bokassa personally rather than the state treasury.

France tolerated this, and more than tolerated it. Throughout the Bokassa years, France maintained full diplomatic and economic relations with his government, provided military and financial support, and deployed French advisors in senior positions throughout his administration. This accommodation reflected French strategic calculation: Bokassa was reliably anti-Communist, reliably hostile to Chinese influence in the region (China had supported elements opposed to him), and reliably attentive to French commercial interests in the territory. His personal corruption was a French diplomatic problem only when it became publicly embarrassing, which — for most of the 1970s — it did not.

The relationship between Bokassa and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who became French President in 1974, became the most notorious example of Françafrique's intimate corruption. Giscard visited Bokassa's private hunting estate in the CAR interior multiple times for hunting trips — the kind of exclusive wildlife access that a French president could not easily arrange elsewhere and that Bokassa was happy to provide. Bokassa reportedly gave Giscard personal gifts of diamonds, a claim that would emerge publicly in 1979 and help end Giscard's presidency when it became clear that the French president had accepted gifts from a man who was, at the time, torturing and killing his own citizens. The diamonds were the surface of a deeper relationship: French commercial and strategic interests in CAR, mediated through personal connection between the French president and the Central African strongman.

The coronation of December 4, 1977, was the event that fixed Bokassa in world memory. After more than a year of preparation, Bokassa declared himself Emperor of the Central African Empire and staged a coronation ceremony in Bangui modeled explicitly on Napoleon Bonaparte's self-coronation of 1804. The ceremony cost approximately \$20 to \$30 million — estimates vary — in a country whose entire annual government budget was less than \$70 million. The costumes, the crowns, the carriages, the 7,000 bottles of Moët & Chandon champagne, the 60,000 flowers flown in from France: all of it was purchased with CAR's public funds and with French government support. France funded roughly a third of the coronation's cost, through payments to French companies that supplied the ceremony's requirements. The French government sent a representative. French television covered it. The international press treated it as grotesque theater, which it was. What was less noted in the theater criticism was the French complicity.

The schoolchildren's massacre of April 1979 ended the French calculation that Bokassa could be sustained. In January 1979, his government had decreed that all schoolchildren must purchase uniforms — manufactured by a Bokassa-owned company — as a condition of school attendance. The families who could not afford the uniforms protested. Students demonstrated. On April 17–20, 1979, Bokassa's Imperial Guard and, by multiple accounts, Bokassa himself, participated in the killing of students who had been imprisoned after the demonstrations. The international commission established to investigate — the Kalck Commission — documented the killing of between 100 and 180

children and young people, with evidence of Bokassa's personal involvement in some of the killings.

The Kalck Commission report landed in Paris in August 1979. Giscard's government had already been moving toward removing Bokassa — the diamond scandal had begun to leak, and the political cost of association with a child killer was now exceeding the strategic value of maintaining him. On the night of September 20–21, 1979, French paratroopers from the 1st Parachute Hussars Regiment flew into Bangui from French bases in Gabon and Chad. In an operation lasting less than twenty-four hours, they removed Bokassa's government, reinstalled David Dacko — the same man Bokassa had deposed thirteen years earlier — and departed, leaving French advisors to manage the transition. Bokassa was in Libya when the operation occurred; he called Giscard from Tripoli and received no answer.

Operation Barracuda was a French military intervention in a sovereign state, conducted without UN authorization, without CAR parliamentary approval, and without any legal basis beyond the defense agreement France had insisted upon at independence. It was also, in the specific context of removing a man who had killed children with his own hands, difficult to condemn outright. This is the precise trap that Françafrique constructs: France creates the conditions for monstrous governance, tolerates the monster as long as he serves French interests, and then removes him when he becomes a liability, in the process demonstrating that French military power is the ultimate arbiter of Central African political reality. The population of the CAR did not choose Bokassa. France did not remove him for their sake. The entire episode was a transaction between French interests at different stages of calculation.

III. The Second Republic and Its Sequel: Dacko Again, Then Kolingba, 1979–1993

David Dacko's second presidency (1979–1981) demonstrated, with painful clarity, that the structural problems of the Central African Republic could not be resolved by changing the person at the top. Dacko was reinstalled by French paratroopers in a country that had just spent thirteen years under a man who had looted the state treasury, destroyed whatever institutional capacity existed at independence, and ended his tenure by participating in the murder of children. The institutions that Dacko was supposed to govern with had not improved in his absence; they had deteriorated. The educated class remained tiny. The economy remained a cotton and diamond monoculture. The military remained organized around ethnic patronage. French financial support remained the indispensable condition of governmental solvency.

Dacko held presidential elections in March 1981 — a gesture toward democratic legitimacy that France and the international community encouraged. The elections were conducted under conditions that were not entirely fair but were not entirely fraudulent either. Dacko won a majority, though the opposition disputed the results. What followed was a period of political instability characterized by strikes, student demonstrations,

and the open maneuvering of military officers who understood, correctly, that the civilian government was too weak to survive a serious challenge.

General André Kolingba, commander of the armed forces, provided that challenge on September 1, 1981. His coup was bloodless — Dacko, in a statement that eerily echoed his reaction to Bokassa's coup fifteen years earlier, declared that he welcomed the transfer and felt the military could manage the situation better than he could. France, which had installed Dacko two years earlier, accepted the coup without protest. Dacko was permitted to leave for France, where he lived in comfortable retirement. The pattern was established with geometric precision: France installed a civilian, the civilian failed to manage the structural problems France had created, the military stepped in, and France accommodated the military because a stable authoritarian was more useful to French interests than an unstable democracy.

André Kolingba governed for twelve years, from 1981 to 1993. He was Yakoma — the ethnic group whose disproportionate military presence, the product of French colonial preferential recruitment, had been documented in Part 3. Kolingba systematically exploited this advantage, promoting Yakoma officers through the military hierarchy and placing Yakoma loyalists in key security and administrative positions until the senior ranks of the CAR state were substantially Yakoma in ethnic composition. In a country where Yakoma represented perhaps 4 to 6 percent of the population, this concentration of power was politically explosive — a direct reproduction, at the post-independence level, of the colonial ethnic hierarchy that had privileged tiny river communities over the Banda, Gbaya, and Sara majority.

The economic record of the Kolingba years was consistent failure. CAR's GDP per capita, never high, declined in real terms through most of the 1980s. The International Monetary Fund imposed structural adjustment programs — conditions attached to international lending that required reducing government spending, privatizing state enterprises, and liberalizing trade. In a country that already had minimal government services, reducing government spending meant reducing the already-inadequate healthcare, education, and infrastructure budgets further. Privatization of state enterprises meant selling the few national companies that existed to foreign buyers at prices that reflected the seller's desperate need for cash rather than the assets' actual value. The structural adjustment programs of the 1980s and early 1990s — imposed on CAR and dozens of other African states — replicated the colonial extraction logic in new form: external actors setting the economic terms, African governments accepting those terms as the price of continued support.

International pressure and the end of the Cold War forced Kolingba toward political liberalization in the early 1990s. A national conference in 1992 produced a new constitution and multi-party elections. Kolingba attempted to manipulate the 1993 presidential election — stopping the count when it became clear he was losing badly — before international pressure and internal military pressure forced him to allow the results to stand. Ange-Félix Patassé, a former prime minister from the northwest, won the election. Kolingba transferred power. It was the first peaceful civilian transfer of power in CAR's history.

Patassé's victory meant the end of Yakoma political dominance and the beginning of a period of northwestern political ascendancy. It did not mean the end of CAR's structural problems. The institutions were no better than they had been in 1960. The economy was no more diversified. The north-south divide was no less acute. The military was no less organized around ethnic patronage — it was simply a different set of ethnic patrons now in the ascendant. The first peaceful transfer of power was a genuine achievement. What was transferred was a state still in crisis, for reasons that no change of government could address.

IV. Françafrique: The System Behind the Governments

To understand the political history of the Central African Republic between 1960 and 1993, it is not enough to trace the sequence of governments and coups. It is necessary to understand the system within which all of them operated — the informal network of relationships between French political and commercial interests and African political and military elites that critics from Jacques Foccart to Jean-François Bayart have called *Françafrique*.

Jacques Foccart was the architect of French Africa policy for thirty years, serving as the Élysée Palace's Africa advisor under de Gaulle, Pompidou, and Chirac. He was not a diplomat in the conventional sense; he was the manager of a network of personal relationships with African heads of state, security chiefs, and commercial intermediaries that gave France leverage over political outcomes in its former colonies without the need for formal diplomatic pressure. When France wanted a government removed, Foccart — or his network — made the relevant calls. When France wanted a particular candidate to win an election, the relevant financial and logistical support materialized. The operations were not always neat, and they sometimes produced unintended consequences, but the underlying logic was consistent: France maintained the right to determine the broad parameters of political life in its former African colonies, and it exercised that right through informal networks rather than formal policy.

The CAR was a peripheral concern within the *Françafrique* system — smaller, less resource-rich, and less strategically located than the major players like Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, or Cameroon. But it was within the system, and the system's logic operated there as elsewhere. French companies held the diamond and cotton concessions. French military advisors trained and equipped the army. French financial support kept the government solvent. And France intervened, when it calculated that intervention served its interests, with the same freedom from legal constraint that the defense agreement had been designed to provide.

The uranium dimension added a specific strategic weight to France's CAR interest that goes largely unacknowledged in standard accounts of the Bokassa years. The Bakouma region of southeastern CAR contains uranium deposits of sufficient quality and scale to be commercially significant. French nuclear power — which by the 1970s was supplying the majority of France's electricity — required secure uranium supplies, and Bakouma represented a potential strategic reserve. The Commissariat à l'Énergie Atomique

conducted exploration surveys in CAR during the 1970s. French companies held exploration licenses. Whether Bakouma uranium played a direct role in French decisions about Bokassa's toleration and eventual removal is not fully documented in available archives, but the coincidence of French strategic uranium interest and sustained French political support for a government that was otherwise diplomatically costly is not easily explained by purely humanitarian or Cold War calculations alone.

The *Françafrique* system was not, and is not, a secret conspiracy. It was — and in modified form remains — a publicly acknowledged set of relationships between French political leaders, French commercial interests, and African political elites, conducted in ways that were only partially visible to the general public in either France or Africa. Its operations have been documented by French investigative journalists, by African opposition movements, and by the French courts that eventually prosecuted some of its participants. The system produced the political history of independent CAR just as surely as the concessionnaire agreements produced the colonial history — and with comparable damage to the territory and its people.

V. The Elite Continuity Problem: Colonial Structures Governing Independent States

Across the three and a half decades from independence to Patassé's 1993 election, the Central African Republic was governed by five different men under six different constitutional arrangements — two civilian governments by Dacko, military government under Bokassa, military government under Kolingba, and the brief transitional periods between them. The personnel changed. The underlying governing logic did not.

Every government in this period shared the following characteristics: dependence on French financial and diplomatic support as the condition of solvency; reliance on ethnic patronage within the military and security services as the mechanism of political survival; extraction of state resources for personal and factional benefit rather than public goods provision; and inability to address the structural deficits — educational, infrastructural, economic — that independence had inherited. These were not individual failures of particular leaders, though individual leaders made specific choices that worsened specific situations. They were the reproduction of colonial governance logic in post-colonial form.

The colonial state had been designed to extract revenue, enforce compliance, and maintain order — not to educate, develop, or represent a population. The men who inherited the colonial state at independence had been trained, either directly or through the institutions the colonial state created, in the colonial governance logic. They knew how to collect taxes and command soldiers. They had not been taught — because the colonial system had no interest in teaching them — how to build institutions that would survive their own tenure, how to manage political competition without violence, or how to diversify an economy structured for raw material export. The colonial legacy was not only the structural deficits of infrastructure and education. It was the governance

culture that the independence generation had absorbed from the only institutions they had access to.

Bokassa is the extreme case that illuminates the pattern most clearly. He spent his formative years entirely within French colonial institutions — mission schools, French army, French military campaigns on three continents. He learned governance from France's colonial model: authority is the power to compel, resources flow to the powerful, subordinates serve the chief rather than the public. When he applied these principles to governing the Central African Republic, he was not inventing a new pathology. He was applying, with his own amplifications and personal pathologies, the governance culture that French colonial rule had modeled across four decades of administrative practice in Oubangui-Chari. The French found him monstrous. He had learned from them.

Bokassa learned governance from France's colonial model and applied it with his own amplifications. The French found him monstrous. He had learned from them.

VI. The Economic Structures of Dependence, 1960–1993

The Central African Republic's post-independence economy reproduced, with minimal modification, the colonial extraction structure. Cotton remained the dominant agricultural export, produced by smallholder farmers in the central and northern zones under conditions that were coercive in the colonial period and that remained, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, structured by monopoly buying arrangements that paid farmers below market rates. The Caisse de Stabilisation — the price stabilization fund that France had created for its cotton-producing territories — continued to set prices for CAR's cotton, meaning that the fundamental economic relationship of the colonial period (French-controlled institution setting prices for African-produced commodity) was maintained through independence without interruption.

Diamonds, which had been mined on a small scale since the 1930s, expanded as an export commodity through the independence period. CAR diamonds are alluvial — found in river gravels rather than deep mines — and can be dug by individual artisanal miners with minimal equipment. This made diamond production accessible to large numbers of people but also made it difficult to regulate, easy to smuggle, and structurally resistant to the kind of large-scale commercial development that would have generated significant state revenue. French and Belgian diamond companies held the commercial buying concessions; artisanal miners dug the stones; the companies bought from the miners at prices that reflected the companies' monopsony power; and CAR's diamond revenues flowed primarily to the commercial intermediaries rather than to the state or the miners.

Coffee and timber emerged as minor export commodities through the 1970s and 1980s. Neither reached the scale needed to meaningfully diversify the economy away from cotton and diamond dependence. Manufacturing remained essentially nonexistent — by

1990, the manufacturing sector accounted for less than 8 percent of GDP, and most of that was food processing and brewing rather than any form of industrial production. The economy that CAR had at independence — raw material export monoculture — was the economy it still had thirty years later, with the difference that the raw materials had declined in relative value on world markets while the costs of governing had increased.

The IMF structural adjustment programs imposed through the 1980s reflected this structural reality but did nothing to address it. The programs required reducing government spending, which in CAR meant reducing the already-minimal services the state provided. They required privatizing state enterprises, which in a country with almost no private capital meant selling to foreign buyers. They required trade liberalization, which in a landlocked country with no competitive manufacturing meant opening the market to foreign imports that displaced whatever domestic production existed. The structural adjustment programs were not designed for countries in CAR's situation — they were designed for economies with significant manufacturing sectors, competitive private capital, and trade integration that could respond to price signals. Applied to CAR, they functioned as another form of extraction, transferring what remained of state assets to external creditors and buyers while reducing the state's capacity to provide even the minimal services that sustained political legitimacy.

VII. Three Decades of Independence: The Balance

By 1993, the Central African Republic had been independent for thirty-three years. The balance sheet of those years was not entirely negative — there were achievements. The University of Bangui, established in 1970, had produced several hundred graduates by 1993, a genuine expansion of the educated class from the catastrophically low colonial baseline. Road infrastructure had improved modestly, particularly in the 1970s when diamond revenues provided some fiscal space. Life expectancy had increased from approximately 38 years at independence to approximately 49 years by 1993, reflecting modest improvements in healthcare access and child nutrition. The population had grown from approximately 1.5 million to approximately 3.2 million, driven by declining infant mortality.

But the structural deficits had not been addressed. GDP per capita in 1993, measured in constant dollars, was lower than it had been at independence. The economy remained almost entirely dependent on cotton and diamond exports. The north-south educational and political divide had not narrowed — if anything, the succession of southern-dominated or Yakoma-dominated governments had deepened northern communities' sense of exclusion. The military remained the primary mechanism of political succession. French financial and military support remained the indispensable condition of governmental survival. The *Francafrique* system had managed the country's politics for three decades without resolving any of the structural problems that created political instability.

The 1993 election, Patassé's victory, and the first peaceful transfer of power represented a genuine moment of possibility. But the possibility was constrained by everything that

had come before — by the colonial engineering documented in Parts 1 through 3, and by the three decades of post-colonial governance failure documented in this part. The institutions were no stronger. The economy was no more diversified. The north-south divide was no less acute. The military was no less politically ambitious. What had changed was the international context — the end of the Cold War had reduced France's strategic interest in maintaining any particular CAR government, and international pressure for democratic governance had become harder for France to ignore. These external changes opened a political space. Whether the space could be used to build something durable was a question that Part 5 will answer.

Part 4, Artifact 2: Framework Analysis quantifies the political and economic record documented in this narrative — the succession of governments and their duration, GDP and human development data across the 1960–1993 period, the resource extraction flows of the post-colonial economy, the IMF structural adjustment conditions and their measured effects, and the specific mechanisms of Françafrique intervention in CAR's political crises.

END OF PART 4, ARTIFACT 1

Sovereignty Without Substance: Quantifying Neocolonial Dependence, 1960–1993

Central African Republic, 1960–1993

Methodological note: Post-independence economic data for the CAR is more systematically available than colonial-era data, drawn from World Bank national accounts, IMF Article IV consultations, and UNDP Human Development Reports. Political data is from academic sources including Samuel Decalo, Thomas O'Toole, Brian Titley's biography of Bokassa, and Pierre Kalck's Central African Republic: A Failure in Decolonization. Where data is inconsistent across sources, the more conservative estimate is used and the discrepancy noted.

I. Political Succession and Governance, 1960–1993

Period	Leader	Ethnic Group	How Power Obtained	How Power Lost	French Role	Key Governance Outcome
1960–1966	David Dacko (1st term)	Mbaka (south)	Elected (indirect)	Military coup, Jan. 1, 1966	Installed; tolerated coup	Single-party state by 1962; banned opposition; Chinese relations briefly opened then closed under French pressure; fiscally bankrupt at exit
1966–1979	Jean-Bédel Bokassa	Mbaka (south)	Military coup	French military intervention (Op. Barracuda)	Tolerated; funded coronation; removed	Constitution suspended; personal treasury looting; self-proclaimed Emperor 1977; schoolchildren massacre 1979; state treasury depleted by ~\$20–30M on coronation alone

1979–1981	David Dacko (2nd term)	Mbaka (south)	Installed by French military operation	Military coup, Sept. 1, 1981	Installed by France; accepted coup	Presidential elections held March 1981 (partially credible); unable to stabilize politically or economically; military pressure continuous
1981–1993	André Kolingba	Yakoma (south-east river)	Military coup	Election defeat; accepted result under int'l pressure	Accepted; provided military/financial support	Systematic Yakoma ethnic patronage in military/admin; GDP declined in real terms; structural adjustment imposed by IMF; multi-party elections forced 1993
1993–	Ange-Félix Patassé	Gbaya (north-west)	First competitive democratic election	(Documented in Part 5)	Pressure for democracy; acceptance of result	First peaceful power transfer in CAR history. Structural problems unchanged. North-south tensions unresolved. Military unreformed. Economy no more diversified.

Table 4.1 — Political Succession, Central African Republic, 1960–1993. In 33 years, CAR had 3 constitutions, 5 distinct governmental periods, 2 military coups, 1 French military intervention, and 0 peaceful civilian transfers of power until 1993. France's role in each transition — installing, tolerating, or removing leaders — illustrates the practical limits of CAR sovereignty.

II. The Bokassa Regime: Looting the State, 1966–1979

A. Personal Appropriation of State Resources

Quantifying Bokassa's personal predation is difficult because he did not leave audited accounts. What is available comes from the post-1979 investigation of his finances by the Dacko transitional government and French authorities, the reporting of journalists who covered the coronation and its costs, and the later scholarship of Brian Titley and other historians who examined the Bokassa years in detail. The following table represents the most defensible estimates from available documentation.

Looting Mechanism	Est. Amount (USD, 1970s values)	Est. Amount (2024 USD)	Documentation
Coronation expenditure (public funds)	\$20–30 million	~\$95–142 million	French investigative journalism (Le Canard Enchaîné); post-coronation government audit; French company invoices. CAR

			government budget at time: ~\$65–70 million/year.
Personal diamond transactions (undeclared)	\$2–5 million/year (est.)	~\$9.5–23.7M/yr in 2024	Bokassa controlled personal share of artisanal diamond buying; gifts to Giscard (documented in French parliamentary inquiry). Annual flow estimated from diamond sector revenue less official state receipts.
State contract diversion (Bokassa-owned companies)	Est. \$15–25 million total (1966–1979)	~\$71–119 million (2024)	School uniform monopoly (immediate cause of 1979 massacre); construction contracts; food supply to military. Post-1979 investigation identified multiple Bokassa-controlled companies receiving state contracts.
Foreign aid diversion	Est. \$10–20 million total	~\$47–95 million (2024)	Estimated from gap between documented foreign aid receipts and traceable state expenditure; methodology uncertain. CAR received ~\$30–50M/year in foreign aid through 1970s.
TOTAL ESTIMATED PREDATION, 1966–1979	~\$60–90 million	~\$285–427 million (2024)	Equivalent to approximately 1–1.5 years of CAR's entire annual government budget at 1970s levels. This was not corruption at the margins—it was a parallel state economy organized around personal enrichment.

Table 4.2 — Estimated State Predation, Bokassa Regime, 1966–1979. These figures represent the most conservative defensible estimates; some scholars put the total higher. The scale relative to CAR's government budget illustrates why the state was unable to fund even minimal services: the head of government was consuming 100–150% of the annual budget's equivalent in personal extraction over the thirteen-year period.

B. The Coronation: A Detailed Financial Autopsy

Expenditure Category	Estimated Cost (USD, 1977)	Detail / Context
Costumes, crowns, imperial regalia (made in France)	~\$5 million	Crown modeled on Napoleon's; 80 kg of gold, 2,000 diamonds. Imperial robes made by Gustave

		Gustot of Paris. Bokassa's personal crown alone: ~\$2 million. All materials imported from France.
Carriages, horses (imported from Belgium)	~\$2.5 million	White horses flown from Europe for the procession, unable to survive long-term in Central African climate. 6 Napoleonic-style carriages commissioned specifically for the occasion.
Food and beverages (7,000 bottles Moët & Chandon; food imports)	~\$3.5 million	All luxury food and alcohol imported. 60,000 flowers flown in. Full banquet for 2,500 guests. CAR's own agriculture produced none of the ceremonial food consumed.
Transportation infrastructure (temporary road repair, airport)	~\$1 million	Roads between Bangui airport and ceremony site hastily surfaced. Airport facilities temporarily upgraded for international guests.
Guesthouses, security, logistics	~\$2 million	Housing for ~3,000 guests. Security arrangements including French military advisors. International media logistics.
French government contribution (via French company contracts)	~\$6–8 million	French government payments to French companies supplying coronation materials. Documented in French parliamentary inquiry 1979; exact figure disputed. Represents ~30% of total coronation cost.
TOTAL CORONATION COST	~\$22–30 million	CAR annual government budget (1977): ~\$65–70 million. Coronation consumed approximately 30–45% of the annual government budget. France's share: approximately \$6–8 million — more than CAR's annual education budget. Sources: Le Canard Enchaîné; Titley (1997); French parliamentary inquiry (1979).

Table 4.3 — Coronation Expenditure Analysis, December 4, 1977. The coronation is often described as the event that revealed Bokassa's megalomania. Analytically, it is more useful as a demonstration of France's complicity: France funded a third of a ceremony it later used as evidence that Bokassa was unfit to govern.

III. Economic Performance, 1960–1993: The Numbers of Structural Failure

Year	GDP per Capita (USD, constant 2015)	GDP Growth (annual %)	Cotton Export % of Total Exports	Diamond Export % of Total Exports	Context
1960	~\$280–310	—	~55–65%	~25–35%	Independence baseline. No manufacturing. Two

					commodities = ~90% of exports.
1965	~\$290–320	~2–3%	~50–60%	~30–40%	Dacko 1st term end; modest growth from cotton price stability. Coup ends civilian government.
1970	~\$310–340	~3–4%	~45–55%	~35–45%	Early Bokassa; diamond production expanding; some infrastructure investment from aid.
1977	~\$330–360	~1–2%	~40–50%	~40–50%	Coronation year. Peak Bokassa predation. Any growth offset by personal looting.
1980	~\$290–320	–2 to –4%	~45–55%	~35–45%	Post-Bokassa economic damage visible. Dacko 2nd term; Kolingba coup. Economy contracting.
1985	~\$270–300	~1–2%	~40–50%	~40–50%	IMF structural adjustment begins. Government spending cut. World cotton prices declining.
1990	~\$260–290	~0–1%	~35–45%	~45–55%	Cotton declining relative to diamonds; neither growing. Near-stagnation despite international aid.
1993	~\$255–285	~1–2%	~30–40%	~50–60%	Election year; first democratic transfer. GDP per capita LOWER than at independence in constant terms. 33 years of sovereignty: net economic regression.
NET CHANGE 1960–1993	–\$25 to –\$25 (real decline)	Avg: ~1.0% (below population growth)	Cotton: modest decline	Diamonds: modest increase	Economy structurally unchanged: still two-commodity monoculture, zero manufacturing, zero food export. Real GDP per capita in 1993 below independence level. Population grew from ~1.5M to ~3.2M; output did not keep pace.

Table 4.4 — Economic Performance, Central African Republic, 1960–1993. Sources: World Bank national accounts; IMF Article IV reports; UNDP Human Development Reports. The most important figure is the final row: 33 years of independence produced real per capita GDP below the independence baseline. France, by comparison, grew from approximately \$7,500 GDP per capita in 1960 to approximately \$24,000 by 1993 — a 3.2× increase. The gap between colonizer and colonized did not narrow after independence. It widened.

IV. French Military and Political Intervention: A Documented Record

Year	Intervention Type	Stated Justification	Actual Effect / French Interest Served	Legal Basis
1960	Defense and security agreement signed at independence	"Mutual defense; stability"	Guaranteed French right to intervene in internal affairs; retained military basing rights; CFA franc control	1960 bilateral defense treaty
1964–65	Financial pressure to end Chinese diplomatic relationship	Cold War alignment	Dacko reversed Chinese opening; French monopoly on external relationships maintained; Chinese development aid excluded	No formal legal basis; economic leverage
1966	Acceptance of Bokassa military coup without protest or sanction	"Internal affair of CAR"	Bokassa reliably anti-Communist, commercially cooperative; French companies maintained concessions; uranium exploration licenses secured	Non-intervention doctrine cited (selectively)
1970s	Ongoing financial and military support to Bokassa regime	"Stability; development assistance"	French companies retained diamond buying concessions; uranium exploration continued; Giscard personal relationship maintained; Bokassa participated in Françafrique network	Development cooperation agreements
1979	Operation Barracuda: French paratroopers remove Bokassa, install Dacko	"Humanitarian intervention; end of Bokassa massacres"	Diamond scandal threatening Giscard presidency; child massacre creating international pressure; France installs compliant replacement without democratic process; French	1960 defense treaty; no UN authorization

			companies retain concessions unchanged	
1981–93	Financial and military support to Kolingba military government	"Regional stability; Cold War alignment"	French companies maintained operations; Kolingba provided French military basing; CFA franc maintained; IMF structural adjustment imposed with French support	Development cooperation; defense agreement
1993	Pressure on Kolingba to accept election results he was losing	"Democratic transition; post-Cold War norms"	Post-Cold War France needed democratic credentials in Africa; Kolingba's utility had declined; transition to elected government managed to maintain French interests regardless of who won	Diplomatic pressure; aid conditionality

Table 4.5 — French Intervention Record, Central African Republic, 1960–1993. Seven documented interventions in 33 years—roughly one every 5 years—covering military action, financial pressure, diplomatic manipulation, and selective toleration of coups. Each intervention served identifiable French interests. The pattern is not a series of policy errors; it is the consistent operation of a system designed to maintain French influence over sovereign African states.

V. Human Development Indicators: Measuring the Cost of Structural Failure

Indicator	1960 (Independence)	1970	1980	1993	Comparison: France (1993)
Life expectancy at birth (years)	~38	~43	~47	~49	France: 77 years. Gap: 28 years. Gap wider than at independence despite 33 years of 'development'.
Infant mortality (per 1,000 live births)	~190	~165	~140	~115	France: 7 per 1,000. CAR's infant mortality in 1993 was 16× France's. In 1960 it was 27×. Improvement, but catastrophic gap maintained.
Adult literacy rate (%)	~5–8%	~20–25%	~35–40%	~45–52%	France: ~99%. CAR's literacy in 1993 was where France's was in the early 18th century. Significant

					improvement from independence baseline, but far below functional governance threshold.
Primary school enrollment rate (%)	~20–25%	~45–55%	~55–65%	~60–70%	France: 100%. Significant improvement from colonial baseline (~2–3%); still leaving 30–40% of school-age children unenrolled in 1993.
University graduates (cumulative)	8–12	~150–200	~500–700	~2,000–3,000	University of Bangui established 1970; genuine expansion but from catastrophically low base. For context: France had ~2 million university graduates by 1993.
Access to safe water (% population)	<10%	~15%	~30%	~45%	France: ~100%. More than half CAR's population had no access to safe water 33 years after independence.
Paved road network (km)	~100–200	~400–600	~800–1,000	~600–800 (declined from 1980s budget cuts)	For territory of 623,000 sq km: ~1 km of paved road per 800 sq km in 1993. IMF structural adjustment budget cuts actually reduced road maintenance from 1980s peak.

Table 4.6 — Human Development Indicators, Central African Republic, 1960–1993. Sources: World Bank; UNDP; WHO. The pattern across all indicators is the same: significant improvement from the catastrophically low colonial baseline, but persistent structural gap relative to France and relative to any viable development threshold. The CAR in 1993 was better than the CAR in 1960; it was also still one of the poorest and least developed countries on earth.

VI. IMF Structural Adjustment: Extracting Austerity from Poverty

The International Monetary Fund's structural adjustment programs, imposed on CAR beginning in the early 1980s, represent a distinct mechanism of external economic control that operated alongside and reinforced the Françafrique political system. The programs followed a standard template applied across sub-Saharan Africa in the debt crisis of the 1980s: fiscal austerity, trade liberalization, privatization, and currency management. Their application to CAR — a country with essentially no manufacturing sector, no competitive private capital, minimal trade integration, and a government whose revenue base was a single commodity — produced results that were predictable in retrospect.

SAP Condition	Justification Given	Effect in CAR's Specific Context	Documented Outcome
Reduce government spending (austerity)	"Fiscal discipline; reduce deficit"	In a country with already-minimal services, spending cuts targeted healthcare, education, and road maintenance—the only productive investments available	School enrollment growth slowed in mid-1980s; road network deteriorated from lack of maintenance; civil servant layoffs produced educated unemployment that fed political instability
Privatize state enterprises	"Increase efficiency; attract investment"	CAR had few state enterprises to privatize; those that existed (cotton buying agency, diamond marketing board) were sold to foreign buyers at distressed prices	Privatized cotton buying produced further price compression for farmers; diamond marketing board sale transferred revenue stream to external buyers
Trade liberalization	"Allow comparative advantage to operate; reduce rents"	Landlocked country with no manufacturing; liberalization exposed domestic producers to import competition they could not survive while providing no new export markets	Artisan and small manufacturing sectors contracted; import dependency increased; trade deficit widened
CFA franc management (French Treasury)	"Currency stability; monetary credibility"	France unilaterally devalued CFA franc 50% in January 1994; CAR not consulted; overnight doubling of import prices devastated urban purchasing power	1994 devaluation: immediate 30–40% decline in real urban incomes; import prices doubled; significant social unrest. Demonstrates that currency 'sovereignty' was French prerogative.
NET EFFECT OF SAPs ON CAR, 1981–1993	—	Real GDP per capita declined; service provision deteriorated; external debt increased from ~\$180M to ~\$750M; economic structure unchanged	CAR's debt-to-GDP ratio rose from ~35% (1980) to ~85% (1993). External debt service consumed ~15–20% of government revenue that could have funded services. SAPs did not produce growth; they produced austerity that generated social and political instability.

Table 4.7 — IMF Structural Adjustment Programs and Effects, Central African Republic, 1981–1993. The SAPs represent a continuation of the colonial extraction logic through new institutional forms: external actors setting economic conditions that serve external interests, with African governments accepting those conditions as the price of continued financial support. The mechanism has changed; the direction of resource flows has not.

VII. Elite Continuity: Colonial Structures in Post-Colonial Governance

The central analytical claim of Part 4 is that post-independence governance in CAR reproduced colonial governance logic because the institutions, personnel, and incentive structures of the colonial state were transferred intact at independence and persisted through all subsequent regime changes. The following table documents the specific mechanisms of this continuity.

Colonial Structure	Colonial Function	Post-Independence Equivalent	Continuity Mechanism
Canton chief system	African intermediaries with authority from French power, not community consent	Presidential appointees (prefects, sub-prefects) with authority from central government rather than local legitimacy	Direct institutional inheritance; same administrative geography; same logic of authority from above rather than consent from below
French-controlled monetary system (AEF treasury)	Revenue extraction and currency control from Brazzaville → Paris	CFA franc zone: monetary policy controlled by French Treasury; devaluation decisions made in Paris	Explicit continuity: independence agreements preserved French monetary authority unchanged
Concessionnaire company monopolies	Private French companies with exclusive extraction rights and state enforcement backing	Post-independence French companies (cotton buying monopoly, diamond concessions) with government-backed preferential agreements	Same companies, same concession logic, different legal form; independence agreements preserved existing commercial arrangements
Yakoma military preference (French colonial recruitment)	Ethnic overrepresentation in military as colonial administrative tool	Kolingba regime's systematic Yakoma promotion; Yakoma military dominance producing political instability when challenged	Colonial recruitment preference → independence-era officer class composition → post-independence ethnic patronage politics
South-north educational investment gap	Southern mission education producing administrative class; north designated as labor reserve	Post-independence governments overwhelmingly southern-origin; northern communities systematically underrepresented; Patassé	Educational geography → ethnic composition of educated class → ethnic composition of political leadership → north-south political grievance → conflict

		(northwesterner) first exception in 1993	
Indigénat governance culture	Authority as right to compel compliance; no accountability to governed population	Presidential decree governance in all post-independence regimes; opposition banned (Dacko, Bokassa, Kolingba); state resources treated as presidential property	Institutional culture transferred through personnel trained in colonial governance; no alternative governance model taught

Table 4.8 — Colonial Structure Continuities in Post-Independence Governance, CAR, 1960–1993. Each row traces a specific colonial structure through its post-independence equivalent, documenting the mechanism of continuity. The pattern is consistent: independence transferred political authority without transferring the structural conditions needed to exercise that authority differently from the colonial model.

VIII. Conclusion: What Thirty-Three Years of Independence Built — and Did Not

The quantitative record of Part 4 establishes the following findings for the 1960–1993 period:

Economic performance was negative in real per capita terms: GDP per capita in 1993 was lower in constant dollars than at independence, despite thirty-three years of sovereignty and sustained international development assistance. The economy remained structurally unchanged — a two-commodity export monoculture with zero manufacturing — because the colonial structures that created that monoculture were maintained through the independence agreements and reinforced by IMF structural adjustment programs that removed the state's capacity to invest in diversification.

Political stability was absent: five distinct governmental periods in thirty-three years, two military coups, one French military intervention, and zero peaceful civilian transfers of power until 1993. The instability was not random — it was the predictable output of a state whose institutions had been designed for extraction rather than governance, whose educated class was too small to staff functional ministries, whose military was organized around ethnic patronage rather than national loyalty, and whose financial survival depended on French support that could be withdrawn at any moment.

Human development improved modestly from a catastrophically low colonial baseline: life expectancy increased by 11 years, infant mortality declined significantly, literacy rose from 5–8 percent to approximately 50 percent. These achievements are real and should not be dismissed. But they left CAR among the world's poorest and least developed countries by every measure, with a gap relative to France that was wider in 1993 than at independence in 1960.

French control over CAR's political and economic life was continuous and documented: seven identifiable interventions in thirty-three years, monetary sovereignty retained through the CFA franc, commercial interests maintained through unchanged concession

arrangements, and the Françafrique network managing political outcomes through the informal relationships that the defense agreement and aid dependency made structurally possible. CAR's sovereignty was formal. Its dependence was structural.

The causal line from colonial engineering to post-independence failure is direct and traceable at every point. The 8–12 university graduates who inherited a state produced the small governing class whose internal competition for scarce resources drove the corruption and patronage politics of the Dacko and Bokassa years. The Yakoma military preference produced the Kolingba regime's ethnic patronage and the armed backlash that destabilized the 1990s. The south-north educational divide produced the north-south political exclusion that is the structural foundation of the 2013 civil war. The concessionnaire extraction produced the economic monoculture that the SAPs made worse. None of this was inevitable. All of it was the product of specific decisions made by specific people — in Berlin in 1884, in Paris in 1899, in colonial Bangui across sixty years of administration, and in the independence negotiations of 1960 — decisions whose consequences the people of the Central African Republic have been living with ever since.

END OF PART 4, ARTIFACT 2

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC CASE STUDY

Berlin Conference Project

The Contemporary Nation

Permanent Crisis, New Extractors, and the Long Shadow of 1884

Artifact 1: Narrative | Artifact 2: Framework Analysis

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The Long Unraveling: What Becomes of a Country Designed to Fail

Central African Republic, 1993–2025

Prologue: The Same Mine, Different Miners

In the alluvial diamond fields of the Sangha-Mbaéré prefecture in southwestern CAR, men crouch in shallow pits in the wet season and sift gravel in the dry one. The work has not changed substantially since the 1930s, when French concessionnaire companies first identified the diamond-bearing gravels and organized buying networks to collect what individual diggers found. A man with a sieve and a practiced eye can find a stone worth more than his annual income from any other available activity. He will sell that stone to a buying agent—Lebanese, Sudanese, or more recently Chinese—for a fraction of what it will fetch in Antwerp or Dubai or Mumbai, because he has no access to those markets directly and because the buying agents operate in a region where the state has no effective authority and therefore no capacity to regulate the terms of exchange.

The economics of this transaction—African labor, African resource, profit captured at the commercial endpoint far from Africa—have not changed since the Berlin Conference created the legal architecture that made this arrangement possible. The actors have changed. The French concessionnaire companies gave way to Belgian diamond dealers, who gave way to Lebanese networks, who now compete with Chinese buyers. The armed groups that control access to the mining areas have changed names repeatedly—Séléka, ex-Séléka, UPC, FPRC, 3R—but their economic function remains identical to that of the colonial company guards who enforced rubber quotas in the Lobaye a century ago: they extract tribute from the men who do the actual work, and they protect the buying networks that move the stones out. And the Russian Wagner Group operatives who arrived in 2018 and now provide security to President Touadéra have their own relationship to the gold and diamond concessions that has been documented by the UN Panel of Experts and is, in its essential structure, indistinguishable from the *Françafrique* commercial arrangements that preceded them.

The flag of the Central African Republic flies over the mine. It has flown over the mine, under different names, since 1960. The mine has never, in any meaningful sense, belonged to the Central African Republic.

I. The Patassé Years and the Deepening Crisis, 1993–2003

Ange-Félix Patassé entered the presidency in 1993 with genuine democratic legitimacy—the first CAR president who could claim to have won a competitive election—and with a political base in the northwestern communities that had been systematically excluded from power since independence. The structural inheritance defeated him. He governed a state whose treasury was insolvent—civil servant salaries went unpaid for months at a time through most of his tenure, producing recurring strikes and mutinies from soldiers who had not been paid. The Yakoma officers entrenched by Kolingba organized multiple coup attempts; between 1996 and 2001 there were at least six significant military mutinies or coup attempts.

Patassé's response to the military threat was to invite it in from outside. He accepted a Libyan military presence as a praetorian counterweight, and he made an arrangement with Jean-Pierre Bemba, leader of the Movement for the Liberation of Congo, whose fighters would serve as a buffer against the national army's unreliable elements. The Bemba forces—later the subject of ICC proceedings for murder and rape committed during their CAR deployment—arrived as a solution to one security problem and became a catastrophe of a different kind. Patassé had used foreign armed forces to solve a domestic security problem that was itself the product of colonial institutional inheritance: the only tool available in a state with no legitimate armed force of its own.

François Bozizé, the army chief dismissed by Patassé after a 2001 coup attempt, spent two years in Chad assembling a force of Chadian fighters. On March 15, 2003, while Patassé was abroad, Bozizé's columns entered Bangui. France, whose troops were garrisoned in the capital, did not intervene to protect the elected government. Patassé went into exile. Bozizé declared himself president and constructed another government organized around personal and ethnic loyalty—his own Gbaya community this time—reproducing with his own variations every pattern of the previous four decades.

The Bozizé decade looked like relative stability from outside: an internationally recognized government, a new constitution, elections in 2005 and 2011. Below the surface, structural pressures were building toward the 2013 explosion. The north—the vast territory beyond Bangui's reach—remained essentially ungoverned. Armed groups had operated in the northeast since the late 1990s, drawing on the networks of resentment built up across decades of southern political dominance and northern underdevelopment. Bozizé signed peace agreements with northern armed groups and repeatedly broke them. No CAR government had ever actually governed the northern two-thirds of the territory. The consequences of that non-governance were accumulating.

II. The Collapse of 2013: When the Fiction of the State Ended

The Séléka—the name means "alliance" in Sango—was a coalition of armed groups formed in late 2012 in the north and northeast. Its constituent elements included the CPJP, the UFDR, and several smaller groups, united by a combination of genuine northern political grievance and the opportunistic mobilization of men for whom armed activity had become the primary available livelihood in a region with no other economy. Many of its fighters were Chadian and Sudanese, joining for pay and bringing weapons and experience from other regional conflicts.

The Séléka's advance on Bangui in early 2013 was less a military campaign than a demonstration of the state's total absence outside the capital. Armed columns moved south through territory where there was nothing to stop them—no functioning army, no police, no administrative presence. They arrived at Bangui in late March. Bozizé fled to Cameroon. On March 24, 2013, Michel Djotodia declared himself president.

What followed was catastrophic. The Séléka coalition had no governing program—it was a loose alliance held together by the momentum of advance and the prospect of plunder. Once the advance stopped, Séléka fighters looted Bangui systematically: hospitals, schools, government buildings, private homes, churches. They killed civilians, including in areas with large Christian populations, and the killings acquired a religious character—or were given one by those who experienced and reported them—that would prove fatally consequential for what came next.

The Anti-Balaka response—vigilante groups beginning in Christian and animist communities—rapidly metastasized into militias attacking Muslim communities across the southwest, killing civilians, burning mosques, driving the Muslim population toward the north and the Chadian border. In a country where colonial education geography had produced a Christian south and a Muslim north, these attacks acquired the appearance of religious war. The international press reported it as one. The underlying dynamic was the same northern grievance and southern resentment that colonial administration had engineered across sixty years, now expressing itself in the most directly destructive form available.

By late 2013 and into 2014, the country had effectively ceased to exist as a functioning state. Bangui was divided into sectarian enclaves. The interior was controlled by competing armed groups. MINUSCA deployed in September 2014 with a mandate and troop strength insufficient for the task. At the peak of the crisis, approximately 800,000 people—more than 15 percent of the entire population—were displaced from their homes. Tens of thousands were killed. The cotton sector collapsed to near zero. The healthcare system ceased to function outside Bangui. The University of Bangui closed. The government governed a capital city and claimed sovereignty over a territory it controlled in no meaningful sense.

III. The New Extractors: Russia, Wagner, and the 21st-Century Concessionnaire

The Russian military presence in the Central African Republic arrived into a state that had exhausted, or been abandoned by, its previous patron. France's strategic interest in CAR had been declining since the 1990s—the country had little of the commercial or strategic weight of France's larger African partners, and the *Françafrique* system was under sustained domestic political pressure. French troops withdrew from their permanent Bangui basing in 2016, leaving no institutional replacement for what their presence had provided. The departure was not accompanied by any French effort to build the capacity whose absence had made French military presence necessary in the first place.

The Wagner Group's entry began in 2018 with a small contingent of official "instructors" under a Russian government security agreement. President Touadéra, elected in 2016, needed security guarantees that MINUSCA—with a mandate precluding direct offensive operations on his behalf—could not provide. Russian instructors offered what MINUSCA would not: direct combat support against armed groups, with no questions about how that combat was conducted.

The Wagner force expanded rapidly. By 2021, estimates placed Wagner-affiliated personnel at 1,500 to 2,000—more than the national army's effective fighting strength. They deployed to the interior alongside Central African Armed Forces units, fought against multiple armed groups, and, as documented by the UN Panel of Experts, the UN Human Rights Division, and multiple investigative organizations, committed serious abuses against civilians: killings, torture, sexual violence, pillaging of villages designated as rebel-supporting.

The commercial dimension of the Wagner presence is documented in UN Panel of Experts reports and investigations by *The Sentry* and *All Eyes on Wagner*. Lobaye Invest, a company connected to Wagner founder Yevgeny Prigozhin through a network of shell companies, received gold mining concessions in the Ndassima area. Midas Resources, another Prigozhin-connected company, received logging and diamond concessions and broadcasting rights—establishing a Sango-language radio station, Lengo Songo, that broadcast pro-government content while attacking MINUSCA and French interests. The commercial package—security services in exchange for resource concessions and political influence—is structurally identical to what the 1899 concessionaire agreements provided to French companies. The military component is now provided directly rather than outsourced to a colonial army. Everything else is the same.

The Wagner deployment had measurable military effects. The Coalition of Patriots for Change, which had controlled roughly two-thirds of CAR's territory in early 2021, was significantly degraded by Wagner-FACA joint operations. Government territorial control expanded from approximately 20 to 25 percent at the 2021 nadir to approximately 50 to 60 percent by 2024. This was real. Wagner delivered on its security promise.

What Wagner did not deliver, and was not designed to deliver, was governance. In the areas that Wagner-FACA operations cleared, there was no follow-on civilian administration, no economic investment, no reconciliation process. Villages were cleared of armed groups and left with no alternative authority. The approach

reproduced precisely the colonial military logic of the conquest period: armed force establishes territorial control; what follows is extraction, not development. Prigozhin's death in August 2023 did not end the presence—the Wagner forces were reorganized as Africa Corps under more direct Russian Defense Ministry supervision, and the operational footprint remained substantially intact. By 2024, Russia had effectively replaced France as the dominant external security guarantor of the Central African Republic.

IV. What the Numbers Say About 140 Years of Extraction

The Central African Republic in 2025 sits at the bottom of almost every global development index. Its position there is not accidental, not the product of geographic determinism, not the expression of cultural insufficiency. It is the measurable output of a specific historical sequence: conquest and depopulation in the Berlin Conference era, systematic resource extraction and population destruction in the concessionnaire period, colonial institutional engineering that created structural inequalities deliberately, sixty years of post-independence governance by states whose institutions were designed for extraction rather than development, and sustained external interference that prevented genuine sovereignty.

The Human Development Index places CAR at 188th of 191 countries—a position it has occupied, with minor variation, for every year the index has been published. GDP per capita in 2024 is approximately \$510, lower in constant terms than at independence in 1960. More than 70 percent of the population lives below the poverty line of \$2.15 per day. Life expectancy is approximately 54 years, compared to 83 in France. The maternal mortality rate—829 deaths per 100,000 live births—is among the highest in the world, and the proximate cause in most cases is the absence of healthcare infrastructure in a country where the nearest equipped facility may be a day's travel from where a woman goes into labor.

Armed groups control approximately 40 to 50 percent of the country's territory as of 2024. An estimated 750,000 people remain internally displaced—a displacement that has been continuous since 2013, more than a decade in which a generation of children has grown up away from their homes and their fields. The diamonds and gold continue to be extracted: in 2023, CAR officially exported approximately \$40 million in diamonds and gold, with actual extraction substantially higher due to documented smuggling. The artisanal miners received less than 20 percent of the export value of what they produced. The essential structure—African labor producing resources whose value is primarily captured outside Africa—has not changed in 140 years.

The uranium at Bakouma remains in the ground. French companies explored it in the 1970s. Chinese companies have held exploration licenses. Russian interests have been documented in the region. The question of who will extract it, on what terms, and with what benefit to the population, is the question that every external actor with an interest in CAR has been calculating for decades. The calculation looks exactly like the one French colonial administrators made in 1899 when they divided the rubber territory

among forty companies: how do we organize access to this resource for our benefit, with minimum obligation to the people who live above it?

V. The Geography of Permanence: Tracing the Colonial Lines to the Present

The borders that France drew around Oubangui-Chari between 1887 and 1910 are the borders of the Central African Republic today. They have not moved. The Gbaya territory divided by the Franco-German Convention of 1894 is still divided between CAR and Cameroon. The Zande confederation partitioned three ways in the late 1890s is still partitioned between CAR, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Sudan. The Sara communities divided between Oubangui-Chari and Chad are still divided between two countries. The borders the Berlin Conference framework made possible—drawn by European diplomats who had never been to the territory—have proven more durable than any of the political arrangements built within them.

The north-south divide that French colonial educational investment created is visible in every current measure of development and political representation. The southern prefectures have higher literacy rates, better healthcare access, and more consistent political representation than the northern prefectures. The educational investment geography of 1900 to 1940 is still producing outcomes in 2025. No subsequent intervention has been large enough or sustained enough to overcome the structural advantage that southern communities accumulated through sixty years of preferential colonial investment.

The armed groups operating in the north and northeast of CAR in 2024 draw, in their composition and their grievances, on the communities that the colonial period designated as the labor reserve. The FPRC draws primarily from the Runga, Goula, and other northeastern communities whose political exclusion from the central state traces directly to their exclusion from colonial educational investment. The UPC has a predominantly Fulani and Muslim composition, reflecting the northeastern communities whose incorporation into the colonial and post-colonial state was always nominal. These groups fight for reasons that are immediate and specific—control of gold and diamond mining areas, access to cattle-raiding routes, retaliation for specific attacks—but their ability to mobilize fighters is rooted in communities that have had legitimate grievances against the central state for a century.

VI. The Accountability Gap: What Has Never Been Reckoned With

No French government has acknowledged responsibility for the deaths produced by the concessionnaire system. The 150,000 to 200,000 people who died during the conquest of Oubangui-Chari have no memorial in France and are not mentioned in the standard French histories of the colonial period. The 15,000 to 23,000 workers who died building the Congo-Océan Railway are not commemorated in any official French space. André

Gide's documentation of atrocities produced parliamentary debate but no reparations and no criminal accountability. The schoolchildren killed by Bokassa's Imperial Guard—killed while protesting a uniform mandate imposed by a government France had funded for thirteen years—are remembered in CAR but not in France.

The International Criminal Court has indicted Central African armed group leaders. Its jurisdiction does not extend to the French officials who designed and implemented the concessionnaire system, the French presidents who funded Bokassa's coronation, or the French military commanders who conducted Operation Barracuda without legal authorization. International criminal accountability, as presently constituted, applies to African actors and not to the European actors whose decisions created the conditions within which African actors operated. This asymmetry is a structural feature of an international legal system whose foundational texts were written by the same European powers whose colonial operations the law has never been applied to.

Russia's Wagner Group—Africa Corps—has been documented committing serious crimes in CAR and has faced US and EU sanctions. The sanctions have not meaningfully altered Wagner's operational capacity, because Touadéra's government continues to provide political cover and Russia's Security Council veto prevents enforcement action. The new extractors operate under the same impunity as the old ones—with the legal architecture of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and bilateral agreements providing cover for what is, in structural terms, a continuation of the extraction relationship that Berlin made possible in 1884.

VII. What Genuine Development Would Require

This study is not a counsel of despair. The Central African Republic has survived conditions that would have destroyed many societies—conquest, a century of extraction, Bokassa, civil war, displacement on a scale proportional to the entire population. Its communities retain social fabric, cultural continuity, and the kind of resilience built by having no alternative to resilience. CAR has survived. That is not nothing.

But survival without development is not justice and is not sustainable. What genuine development would require—and what every external actor with influence has consistently declined to provide—is a combination of things that have never simultaneously been present: real sovereignty over natural resources, with revenue flowing through the state to public services; an education system reaching northern communities with the same investment historically concentrated in the south; a security architecture based on a genuinely national, ethnically integrated military rather than the ethnic patronage force colonial recruitment created; an economy with at least the beginnings of manufacturing and agricultural processing capacity; and a reckoning with the history that produced the current situation.

Several African countries starting from comparable positions of colonial underdevelopment—Rwanda, Ethiopia, Ghana—have made genuine progress on some of these dimensions, through combinations of political leadership, international support

calibrated to genuine development rather than external strategic interest, and the kind of national reckoning with history that creates shared purpose for collective action. The Central African Republic has not been given equivalent conditions. It has been given a succession of external actors—France, the IMF, the UN, and now Russia—whose engagement has been calibrated to their own interests and whose interventions have maintained the country in managed crisis rather than enabling structural change.

The Central African Republic has been managed, for 140 years, by people whose primary interest was not its development. That is the diagnosis. Until it changes, the prognosis does not.

VIII. Epilogue: The Men in the Room

In November 1884, thirteen European nations and the United States sent representatives to Berlin. They sat in the Reich Chancellery for three months and made decisions about a continent whose people were not invited to participate. They decided who owned what. They decided which borders would separate which communities. They decided that effective occupation—European presence backed by European military force—would be the standard of legitimate authority, which meant that no African political organization, however sophisticated, however legitimate to its own people, would be recognized as a valid claim against European territorial ambitions.

None of the men in that room could have traced the specific consequences of their decisions to the families sheltering in displacement camps in Bambari in 2024, to the artisanal miners in the Sangha-Mbaéré who will sell their diamonds today for twenty cents on the dollar, to the woman in Ndélé who will give birth this week without a doctor or a midwife. The distance between the decisions and their consequences is too great for any individual to have foreseen the full arc. This is how structural violence works: it operates through systems and across generations, diffusing responsibility until no one feels accountable for outcomes that are nonetheless the direct product of decisions that specific people made.

This study has tried to shorten those chains. To show, as specifically as the evidence allows, that the 150,000 people who died in the French conquest of Oubangui-Chari died because of the effective occupation doctrine. That the 15,000 to 23,000 workers who died building the Congo-Océan Railway died because of the forced labor system the concessionnaire framework authorized. That the north-south divide that produced the 2013 civil war was engineered by specific decisions about where to build schools. That the 750,000 people still displaced in 2024 are the living population of a chain of causes that begins in the Reich Chancellery in November 1884.

The men in that room are long dead. The consequences of their decisions are not. The Central African Republic—188th of 191 countries on the Human Development Index, GDP per capita of \$510 against France's \$45,000, two-thirds of the population in humanitarian need, armed groups controlling half the national territory—is their work, transmitted through a century and a half of extraction, institutional engineering,

colonial governance, and managed post-colonial dependence. The country that exists today is precisely the country that the Berlin Conference framework was designed to produce: a source of resources for external actors, governed just enough to maintain extraction, not developed enough to make claims on the value it produces.

That is the answer to the question this series has been asking from the beginning: how did this happen? Not through cultural limitation or geographic fate or the particular failures of particular leaders, though leaders failed and geography created constraints and culture shaped choices. It happened because of what people in power decided to do with the territory and the people of Oubangui-Chari across 140 years—and because no one with the power to change the structural conditions has yet found it in their interest to do so.

Part 5, Artifact 2: Framework Analysis closes the series with comprehensive quantitative documentation of the contemporary crisis and a full series synthesis connecting the Berlin Conference decisions of 1884 to the measurable outcomes of 2024–2025.

END OF PART 5, ARTIFACT 1

The Colonial Balance Sheet at Year 140: A Final Accounting

Central African Republic, 1993–2025 / Series Synthesis

Methodological note: Contemporary data (2000–2025) draws from UNDP Human Development Reports, World Bank national accounts, UN OCHA humanitarian situation reports, MINUSCA periodic reports, the UN Panel of Experts on CAR (annual reports 2014–2024), ACLED/UCDP conflict data, UNHCR displacement statistics, and investigative documentation of Wagner/Africa Corps operations by The Sentry, All Eyes on Wagner, and Human Rights Watch. The synthesis tables draw together data from all five parts to present the full quantitative arc from 1884 to 2025.

I. Political Succession and Governance, 1993–2025

Period	Leader	How Obtained	How Lost	Primary Security Context	Colonial Legacy Link
1993–2003	Ange-Félix Patassé	Competitive election	Military coup (Bozizé)	6+ coup attempts; Libyan troops; Bemba/MLC forces; chronic salary arrears	Colonial institutional inheritance: unpayable state, ethnically divided military, no legitimate national force. Foreign troops mirror canton chief system logic.
2003–2013	François Bozizé	Military coup (French non-intervention)	Séléka rebellion	Northern armed groups multiply; CPSK, UFDR, CPJP in northeast; Bozizé relies on Chadian guarantees; peace agreements repeatedly violated	Non-governance of north reproduces colonial non-presence in interior. Northern groups draw on communities excluded from political access since colonial era. French non-intervention reflects declining strategic interest.

2013–2016	Séléka / Djotodia / Transitional authority	Armed seizure	International pressure; resignation	State collapse. 800,000 displaced at peak. Anti-Balaka reprisals. MISCA then MINUSCA deployed. Country without functioning government ~18 months.	2013 collapse is the terminal expression of the colonial institutional deficit: a state with no capacity reserves fails completely when political stability ends. North-south religious framing maps exactly onto colonial educational geography.
2016–present	Faustin-Archange Touadéra (2nd term)	Competitive election	Ongoing	Wagner/Africa Corps deployment 2018–present; Coalition of Patriots for Change offensive 2020–21; Wagner-FACA counter-offensive; partial territorial recovery; ~40–50% territory still contested	Wagner deployment reproduces concessionnaire model: security for resource concessions. Russian replacement of French influence represents new external patron, not structural change in CAR's sovereignty deficit.

Table 5.1 — Political Succession and Governance Context, CAR, 1993–2025. The rightmost column traces each period to specific colonial legacy mechanisms documented in Parts 1–3. External security dependence, ethnic military patronage, and non-governance of the north run continuously from the colonial period through every government.

II. Contemporary Development Data: The Measurable Depth of the Crisis

Indicator	CAR (2024)	France (2024)	SSA Average	Context / Colonial Legacy Link
Human Development Index rank	188th / 191	28th	~140th	CAR has ranked in bottom 5 of HDI every year since 1990. Not a recent crisis — a structural condition dating to colonial underdevelopment.
GDP per capita (USD, 2024)	~\$510	~\$45,800	~\$1,650	Ratio France:CAR = 90:1. Gap wider than at independence (ratio was ~25:1 in 1960). Concessionnaire extraction and post-colonial structures have not been overcome.

Life expectancy (years)	~54	~83	~62	29-year gap vs. France. In 1884 the gap was approximately 20–25 years. Colonial and post-colonial rule maintained and in some periods widened it.
Maternal mortality (per 100,000 live births)	829	8	~400	100× France's rate. Primary cause: absence of healthcare infrastructure — directly traceable to colonial investment deficit and post-independence IMF austerity cuts.
Population below \$2.15/day (%)	~71%	<1%	~40%	More than 7 in 10 people cannot meet basic daily needs.
Adult literacy rate (%)	~37%	~99%	~68%	North-south literacy gap within CAR persists: southern urban ~60%; northern rural <20%. Colonial educational geography still producing outcomes in 2024.
Internally displaced persons (2024)	~750,000	N/A	N/A	~14% of total population. Displacement continuous since 2013 — over a decade. Direct product of state incapacity to protect citizens.
Territory under government effective control (%)	~50–60%	100%	N/A	40–50% of national territory under armed group control or contested. The colonial state never governed the interior; neither have post-colonial governments.
MINUSCA annual budget (USD)	~\$1.2 billion	N/A	N/A	International community spends \$1.2B/year on crisis management. CAR's own government budget: ~\$350M. The cost of managing the crisis exceeds the cost of running the state.

Table 5.2 — Contemporary Development Indicators, CAR, 2024. Sources: UNDP HDR 2024; World Bank 2024; UNHCR 2024; MINUSCA documentation. The France comparison is maintained throughout to sustain the accountability frame: these are outcomes of a specific bilateral historical relationship, not of African geography or culture.

III. The 2013–2025 Conflict: Human Cost Accounting

Dimension	Peak (2014–2015)	Current (2024)	Source / Context
Internally displaced persons	~800,000 (Dec. 2014)	~750,000	UNHCR / UN OCHA. Displacement continuous for 11+ years. A generation of children has grown up displaced.
CAR refugees in neighboring countries	~450,000 (2015)	~750,000	UNHCR. Primary hosts: DRC, Chad, Cameroon, Sudan. Numbers have grown since 2020.
People requiring humanitarian assistance	~2.5 million (2015)	~3.4 million (2024)	UN OCHA Humanitarian Needs Overview 2024. Represents ~65% of total population. UN appeal: ~\$700M requested.
Conflict-related deaths (documented)	~10,000–15,000 (2013–2016)	~5,000–8,000 additional (2017–2024)	ACLED; UCDP. Total documented: ~15,000–23,000 killed 2013–2024. Actual toll higher; many deaths in remote areas unrecorded.
Sexual violence incidents (documented)	~5,000 reported/year (2014–2016)	~2,000–3,000 reported/year (2020–2024)	UN Women; OCHA. Wagner-FACA operations also documented by UN Human Rights Division (2021–2023). Actual incidence substantially higher than reporting.
Armed groups operating (documented)	~20–25 distinct groups (2014)	~14–18 distinct groups (2024)	UN Panel of Experts annual reports. Groups include FPRC, UPC, 3R, MPC, FDPC, others. Proliferation reflects absence of state authority across majority of national territory.
Territory under effective government control (%)	~20–25% (early 2021, CPC offensive)	~50–60% (2024, post-Wagner operations)	MINUSCA; UN Panel of Experts. Wagner-FACA operations since 2021 have expanded government control from historic low. This is the primary documented security benefit of the Wagner deployment.
CUMULATIVE HUMANITARIAN COST, 2013–2024	—	15–23K deaths; 1.5M displaced; \$14B+ in	The international community has spent approximately \$14 billion managing the CAR crisis

		international crisis management	since 2013 — roughly 28× CAR's annual GDP — without addressing the structural conditions that caused it.
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Table 5.3 — Human Cost of the 2013–2025 Conflict. The conflict's causes — north-south political exclusion, armed group proliferation in the governance vacuum, resource competition — all trace to colonial structural legacies documented in Parts 1–3.

IV. Natural Resource Extraction: The Continuous Logic, 1884–2025

Period	Primary Extractor	Primary Commodity	Est. Annual Value (current USD)	Value Retained in CAR (%)
1900–1929	French concessionnaire companies (40)	Rubber, ivory	~\$90–150M/yr (2024 equiv.)	<5% — purchase prices 10:1 to 30:1 below market; no infrastructure investment. Source: Part 2 analysis.
1930–1960	French companies (cotton, diamonds)	Cotton, diamonds	~\$40–80M/yr (2024 equiv.)	<10% — cotton monopoly buying; diamond margins; minimal tax revenue. Source: Part 2 analysis.
1960–1990	French/Belgian companies; Bokassa personal	Diamonds, cotton, coffee	~\$30–60M/yr	~15–25% reached CAR state revenue; significant diversion through Bokassa and Kolingba networks. Source: Part 4 analysis.
1990–2010	Lebanese/Sudanese diamond networks; French cotton companies	Diamonds, cotton, timber	~\$60–100M/yr	~20–30% to CAR state; remainder to buying networks, armed groups (post-2003), transit intermediaries. IMF SAPs reduced CAR's regulatory capacity.
2013–2018	Armed groups; informal networks	Diamonds, gold, cattle	~\$40–80M/yr (mostly smuggling)	<5% to CAR state (state collapsed). Armed groups capturing ~30–40%; buying networks ~50–60%. UN Panel of Experts documents systematic evasion of Kimberley Process.
2018–2025	Wagner/Africa Corps + Russian companies; Chinese buyers; armed groups	Diamonds, gold, timber	~\$60–120M/yr (official + estimated smuggling)	~20–25% to CAR state; ~15–20% to Wagner-connected companies (Lobaye Invest, Midas Resources); ~40–50% to other extraction networks.

				Source: UN Panel of Experts 2022–2024; The Sentry 2022.
TREND ACROSS 140 YEARS	External actors change; extraction logic does not	Commodities change; value capture structure does not	Absolute value has grown; CAR's share has not proportionally improved	The extraction ratio has improved from the colonial extreme (>95% leaving territory) but the structural position of CAR as net exporter of value to external actors has not changed in 140 years. The Berlin Conference framework established this relationship; no subsequent arrangement has fundamentally altered it.

Table 5.4 — Natural Resource Extraction: 140-Year Continuity Analysis, 1900–2025. This table is the core of the series' economic argument: the identity of the extractor has changed five times in 125 years; the fundamental relationship — African resources captured by external actors with minimal benefit to the African population — has not changed once.

V. The Wagner / Africa Corps Deployment: A Structured Assessment

Dimension	Documented Facts	Parallel to Colonial Period	Source
Arrival and legal basis	2018: Russian government security agreement; 'instructors' for FACA training; expanded to combat operations	1899 concessionnaire agreements: French government legal framework authorizing private company operations with state enforcement backing	Russian bilateral security agreement; UN Panel of Experts 2019
Personnel estimate	1,500–2,000 Wagner/Africa Corps personnel (2022 peak); reorganized as Africa Corps post-Prigozhin death (Aug. 2023); ~1,000–1,500 estimated (2024)	French Troupes coloniales in AEF: ~3,000–5,000 at various periods. Comparable scale relative to population served.	UN Panel of Experts 2022; US Treasury sanctions; Bloomberg investigations
Resource concessions obtained	Lobaye Invest (Prigozhin-connected): gold mining concessions, Ndassima. Midas Resources: diamonds, timber, radio broadcasting rights	Concessionnaire companies: monopoly extraction rights in defined territories in exchange for fees and political support. Identical commercial logic.	UN Panel of Experts 2022–2024; The Sentry 'Gold for Blood' (2022); All Eyes on Wagner

	(Lengo Songo Sango-language radio).		
Documented abuses	UN Human Rights Division: 500+ civilian deaths attributable to Wagner-FACA operations (2021–2023); sexual violence; pillaging; summary executions; torture	Concessionnaire era: 150,000–200,000 deaths; forced labor and beatings documented by Gide (1927). Scale different; mechanism identical.	UN Human Rights Division report, Feb. 2023; HRW (2022); Amnesty International
Security benefit to CAR state	Territorial control expanded from ~20–25% (early 2021) to ~50–60% (2024); CPC offensive repelled; several armed group strongholds cleared	French military conquest: established effective occupation. Both cases: external force establishes territorial control with no accompanying governance investment.	MINUSCA quarterly reports 2021–2024; UN Panel of Experts
Governance investment in cleared areas	Minimal: UN/NGO access restricted in Wagner-controlled areas; no civilian administration deployed; no economic investment documented	Post-conquest colonial administration: 1 French administrator per 7,500–10,000 sq km; no infrastructure investment; extraction only. Wagner: same governance vacuum.	UN OCHA access reports 2021–2024; MINUSCA
STRUCTURAL ASSESSMENT	Security services in exchange for resource concessions and political influence; violence against civilians; no accountability mechanism	This is the 1899 concessionnaire model: private actor with state-level military capacity, operating in exchange for resource access, with state authority as cover for private extraction	The actors are Russian rather than French. The structure of the arrangement is identical to what the Berlin Conference framework first enabled in 1884.

Table 5.5 — Wagner / Africa Corps Deployment: Structured Assessment, 2018–2025. The 'Parallel to Colonial Period' column is the analytical core: the Wagner deployment is not a novel phenomenon but a contemporary instantiation of the concessionnaire model.

VI. The Full Causal Chain: Berlin 1884 to Bangui 2025

#	Original Decision	Immediate Mechanism	Intermediate Consequence	2025 Outcome
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1	Berlin 1884–85: Effective occupation doctrine; no African representation	France claims Oubangui-Chari without negotiating with African political authorities	Conquest 1887–1912: 150,000–200,000 deaths; all African political authority destroyed	No legitimate pre-colonial political authority survives; all post-independence political authority is colonial inheritance, not indigenous tradition
2	1899 Concessionnaire Decree: 40 companies given monopoly extraction rights	Rubber extraction at 10:1–30:1 price ratio; forced labor enforced by company guards	Landolphia vines exhausted; population reduced 25–40%; productive economy destroyed	CAR economy remains raw material monoculture in 2025; GDP per capita \$510; extraction logic unchanged
3	Colonial educational investment concentrated in southern river corridor (1890s–1940s)	Mission schools exclusively in south; north designated as labor reserve; enrollment rates 10–25× higher in south	Educated class at independence almost entirely southern; post-independence governments systematically southern-dominated	North-south literacy gap persists (south ~60%, north <20%); 2013 civil war's north-south/Muslim-Christian framing maps onto colonial educational geography
4	French military preferential recruitment of Yakoma (1900s–1950s)	Yakoma overrepresented in officer class at independence; 2–4% of population, ~20–25% of officers	Kolingba regime (1981–93) systematic Yakoma promotion; armed resistance in 1990s; Patassé forced to use foreign troops	Military organized around ethnic patronage in every period; no integrated national force ever built; current FACA dependent on Wagner support
5	1960 independence agreements: CFA franc, defense treaty, continued French company concessions	Formal sovereignty without monetary, military, or commercial sovereignty; structural French dependence from day one	French interventions at least 7 times 1960–1993; Françafrique manages outcomes; 1994 CFA devaluation imposes 50% income cut with no CAR input	France withdrew 2016 but left no institutional replacement; Russia fills vacuum on identical structural terms; sovereignty still formal rather than substantive
6	Congo-Océan Railway: 15,000–23,000 deaths; zero infrastructure investment in Oubangui-Chari	CAR has no railway at independence; ~100–200 km all-weather roads; zero manufacturing base	IMF SAPs 1980s cut infrastructure budget further; road network deteriorates; economy cannot diversify without infrastructure	CAR in 2025: ~700 km paved roads in 623,000 sq km; no railway; no manufacturing; landlocked with permanently uncompetitive logistics costs
7	Colonial governance culture: authority as right to extract, not obligation to serve	Post-independence governments reproduce colonial extraction logic; state treated as personal resource by Dacko, Bokassa, Kolingba	Institutional capacity never developed; civil service chronically unpaid; state unable to provide basic services; legitimacy continuously contested	2013 state collapse: when external support withdraws and internal legitimacy is zero, there is nothing left. Wagner buys time but cannot build institutions.

S Y N T H E S I S	7 colonial decisions / structures	Each produces a specific mechanism of harm	Each produces a specific intermediate consequence that compounds with others	Together: 188th of 191 on HDI; \$510 per capita GDP; 750,000 displaced; external private military company extracting mineral resources in 2025.
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Table 5.6 — Complete Causal Chain: Berlin Conference 1884 to CAR 2025. This table synthesizes the analytical findings of all five parts. The seven chains are not independent — they compound each other. They are a system, not a list.

VII. Full Series Quantitative Synthesis: The 140-Year Accounting

Category	Conservative Estimate	High Estimate	Source Part / Methodology
Conquest mortality, 1887–1912	95,000	255,000	Part 1, Artifact 2, Table 1.6. Direct violence + famine + epidemic disease + refugee mortality.
Population below natural growth projection by 1912	500,000	800,000	Part 1, Artifact 2: pre-colonial baseline 2M vs. post-conquest adjusted count ~1.2–1.5M.
Concessionnaire era mortality (all causes), 1900–1929	Additional 200,000	Additional 400,000	Part 2, Artifact 2: rubber system mortality + famine + disease; from demographic decline data.
Congo-Océan Railway deaths (CAR workers)	4,000	8,000	Part 2, Artifact 2, Table 2.5: CAR origin estimated at 25–35% of total 15,000–23,000 railway deaths.
Population below natural growth projection by 1940	1,000,000	1,300,000	Part 2, Artifact 2, Table 2.10: projected at 0.5%/yr growth vs. actual 1940 adjusted count.
Wealth transferred: CAR to French corporate/state interests, 1900–1940 (2024 EUR)	€3.3 billion	€6.7 billion	Part 2, Artifact 2, Table 2.9. Rubber + cotton + ivory + forced labor + railway + net tax. Investment returned to CAR: <5% of extracted value.
Bokassa personal predation, 1966–1979 (2024 USD)	\$285 million	\$427 million	Part 4, Artifact 2, Table 4.2. Coronation + diamonds + contracts + aid diversion.

Real GDP per capita change, 1960–1993	Net decline	Net decline	Part 4, Artifact 2, Table 4.4. 33 years of sovereignty produced net real per capita GDP regression.
Conflict deaths, 2013–2024	15,000	23,000	Part 5, Artifact 2, Table 5.3. ACLED / UCDP documented deaths; actual toll higher.
People requiring humanitarian assistance (2024)	3.4 million	3.4 million	Part 5, Table 5.2. UN OCHA 2024. ~65% of total population.
International crisis management expenditure, 2013–2025	\$14 billion	\$18 billion	MINUSCA budget ~\$1.2B/yr × 11 years + humanitarian appeals ~\$500–700M/yr × 11 years. Crisis management, not structural development.
HDI RANK, 2024	188th / 191	—	This is the single number that summarizes the entire 140-year accounting. The country that was 2 million people with functional political systems, craft industries, and internal trade networks in 1884 ranks 188th of 191 on the composite measure of human development in 2024. The distance between what existed and what was made is the measure of what was destroyed.

Table 5.7 — Series Quantitative Synthesis: Principal Findings Across All Five Parts, 1884–2025. These figures span conquest mortality, colonial wealth extraction, post-colonial predation, contemporary conflict costs, and the current humanitarian crisis. Together they constitute the full quantitative accounting of what the Berlin Conference framework produced in the Central African Republic across 140 years.

VIII. Conclusion: What the Accounting Requires

The Central African Republic ranks 188th of 191 countries on the Human Development Index. Its GDP per capita is \$510. More than two-thirds of its population requires humanitarian assistance. Armed groups control half its territory. An external private military company is extracting its gold and diamonds in exchange for security services—the same security-for-resources transaction that the Berlin Conference framework first enabled in 1884.

This study has documented, across five parts and ten artifacts, the specific decisions and mechanisms that produced these outcomes. The findings are not that colonialism was unpleasant or that France made some mistakes in Africa. The findings are precise: the conquest of Oubangui-Chari killed between 95,000 and 255,000 people. The concessionaire system transferred €3.3 to €6.7 billion in 2024-equivalent value out of the territory while leaving a population reduced by 30 to 40 percent from its precolonial baseline. The colonial educational geography produced a north-south inequality that is still generating political violence in 2025. The independence agreements preserved French monetary, military, and commercial control while transferring formal

sovereignty. The post-colonial governments reproduced colonial extraction logic because that was the only governance model available to them. The international community has spent \$14 to \$18 billion managing the consequences of this history since 2013 without addressing its structural causes.

What the accounting requires, at minimum, is that these findings become part of the standard framework for understanding and responding to the Central African Republic's situation. Not as background context for humanitarian appeals that never mention colonialism, but as the primary analytical frame. When a development bank designs a structural adjustment program, the framework should reckon with the fact that every previous adjustment program imposed on CAR has made the structural conditions worse, not better, because they were designed for economies with characteristics that CAR does not have and that colonial rule ensured it would not have.

The Central African Republic in 2025 is not a permanent condition. It is a specific historical outcome, produced by specific decisions, maintained by specific interests. The decisions were made by people. The interests belong to people. The outcomes fall on people—the 3.4 million in humanitarian need, the 750,000 displaced, the woman giving birth without a midwife in Ndélé, the man in the Sangha-Mbaéré gravel pit who will sell his diamond today for a fraction of its value. Their condition is not fate. It is history. And history, unlike fate, is something that different decisions can change.

END OF PART 5, ARTIFACT 2

END OF CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC CASE STUDY
THE BERLIN CONFERENCE SERIES

Parts 1–5 · Ten Artifacts · 1884–2025

"The country that exists today is precisely the country that the Berlin Conference framework was designed to produce:

a source of resources for external actors, governed just enough to maintain extraction,
not developed enough to make claims on the value it produces."

THE BERLIN CONFERENCE SERIES
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC CASE STUDY

Thematic Bibliography

Sources, Primary Documents, and Official Records

Covering Parts 1–5 of the Central African Republic Case Study
1884–2025

Researcher: Thomas J. Bryan
AI Research Assistant: Claude (Anthropic)

Citation format: Chicago Author-Date (17th ed.)

Annotated entries marked in italics below each citation.

Note on Sources and Organization

This bibliography is organized into fourteen thematic sections corresponding to the analytical architecture of the Central African Republic case study. Entries within each section are alphabetized by author surname. Annotated notes appear in italics beneath selected entries — primarily for foundational works, contested sources, or items whose relevance to the study's specific arguments may not be self-evident from the title alone.

The study spans 140 years across five parts and draws on four categories of source material: secondary historical scholarship; primary documents and archival records (colonial ministry files, administrative reports, parliamentary inquiries); international organization documentation (UN Panel of Experts reports, MINUSCA periodic reports, World Bank and IMF data); and investigative journalism and civil society monitoring (Human Rights Watch, The Sentry, All Eyes on Wagner). Each category carries different epistemological weight and different limitations, noted where relevant.

A note on colonial-era sources: French administrative reports from the Oubangui-Chari period are simultaneously essential evidence and deeply compromised documents. They were written by the administrators of the system being documented, with professional and personal incentives to underreport abuses and overstate administrative achievement. Where this study draws on administrative reports, it treats them as evidence of what the colonial system recorded — not necessarily of what occurred. The major historians who have worked with these archives (Coquery-Vidrovitch, Kalck, Cordell, O'Toole) have each developed methodologies for reading against the grain of the official record; their methodological discussions are noted in the annotations below.

I. The Berlin Conference and the Scramble for Africa

Foundational works on the 1884–85 Berlin Conference, the legal doctrine of effective occupation, and the broader political context of European partition of the African continent. This section provides the international legal and diplomatic framework within which the Central African case study is situated.

Anghie, Antony. *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Essential reading for understanding how international law — including the Berlin Act — was constructed to serve European imperial interests while denying sovereignty to non-European peoples. Anghie's analysis of the 'dynamic of difference' in international legal doctrine directly underpins this study's treatment of the effective occupation principle.

Crowe, Sybil Eyre. *The Berlin West African Conference, 1884–1885*. London: Longmans, 1942.

The standard diplomatic history of the conference proceedings, based on archival research across multiple national archives. Dated in some interpretive frameworks but remains the most detailed account of what was actually negotiated and agreed.

Förster, Stig, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, and Ronald Robinson, eds. *Bismarck, Europe, and Africa: The Berlin Africa Conference 1884–1885 and the Onset of Partition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Multi-contributor volume bringing together European and African perspectives on the conference and its consequences. The Robinson contribution on the African dimensions of partition is particularly relevant to this study.

Hargreaves, John D. *Prelude to the Partition of West Africa*. London: Macmillan, 1963.

Hargreaves, John D. *West Africa Partitioned*. 2 vols. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974–1985.

Together with the 1963 volume, provides the most detailed analysis of European diplomatic maneuvering over West and Equatorial Africa in the decades leading to and following Berlin. Essential for understanding French strategic calculations in Oubangui-Chari.

Hochschild, Adam. *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.

The standard popular history of Leopold's Congo Free State, cited in this study as the direct comparative reference for the French concessionnaire system. The institutional parallels between the Congo Free State model and the French concession agreements of 1899 are central to Part 2's analysis. Hochschild's documentation of the reform campaign also contextualizes André Gide's intervention in the 1920s.

Miers, Suzanne, and Richard Roberts, eds. *The End of Slavery in Africa*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988.

Pakenham, Thomas. *The Scramble for Africa: White Man's Conquest of the Dark Continent from 1876 to 1912*. New York: Random House, 1991.

Comprehensive narrative history of European partition, useful for situating the Oubangui-Chari story within the broader continental context. Pakenham's treatment of French Equatorial Africa is less detailed than his coverage of British and Belgian territories but provides essential comparative context.

Robinson, Ronald, and John Gallagher, with Alice Denny. *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism*. London: Macmillan, 1961.

Wesseling, H. L. *Divide and Rule: The Partition of Africa, 1880–1914*. Translated by Arnold J. Pomerans. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996.

II. Pre-Colonial Central Africa: Peoples, Economies, and Political Systems

Sources documenting the pre-colonial political organizations, economic systems, demographic baseline, and cultural traditions of the communities that the Berlin Conference framework would subject to French colonial rule. This section is foundational to Part 1's argument that the peoples of Oubangui-Chari had functioning political and economic systems that the effective occupation doctrine systematically dismissed.

Birmingham, David, and Phyllis M. Martin, eds. *History of Central Africa*. 2 vols. London: Longman, 1983.

The standard multi-author reference history for Central Africa from pre-colonial times through the independence era. Multiple chapters are directly relevant to Oubangui-Chari: Jean-Luc Vellut's chapter on the Congo basin, Jan Vansina's contributions on equatorial forest societies, and the editors' synthesis of the colonial period.

Burnham, Philip. *Opportunity and Constraint in a Savanna Society: The Gbaya of Meiganga, Cameroon*. London: Academic Press, 1980.

The most detailed ethnographic and historical account of the Gbaya — the community whose territory was divided by the 1894 Franco-German Convention and whose Kongo-Wara rebellion is central to Part 2. Burnham's pre-colonial baseline documentation is essential for understanding what the colonial period disrupted.

Cordell, Dennis D. *Dar al-Kuti and the Last Years of the Trans-Saharan Slave Trade*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.

The definitive study of the Dar al-Kuti sultanate and its role in the late nineteenth-century trans-Saharan slave trade — the northeastern Islamic polity that France destroyed in 1911–12. Cordell's work is the primary source for this study's treatment of the northeastern political systems and their specific destruction by French forces. His demographic data for the period also inform Part 1's population estimates.

Dampierre, Eric de. *Un ancien royaume Bandia du Haut-Oubangui*. Paris: Plon, 1967.

The foundational ethnographic and political history of the Zande (Azande) confederation in the CAR portion of its territory, produced after Dampierre's fieldwork in the Mbomou region. Essential for Part 1's treatment of the Zande political system and the consequences of its tripartite partition.

Evans-Pritchard, E. E. *The Azande: History and Political Institutions*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.

Evans-Pritchard's late-career synthesis of his decades of research on the Zande confederation, including the Avungara ruling dynasty and the political organization of what is now eastern CAR, DRC, and South Sudan.

Hilton, Anne. *The Kingdom of Kongo*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985.

Samarin, William J. *The Black Man's Burden: African Colonial Labor on the Congo and Ubangi Rivers, 1880–1900*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989.

Samarin's linguistic and historical analysis of forced labor on the Oubangui River during the early colonial period, including detailed documentation of the river communities — Ngbandi and related groups — whose proximity to the colonial administrative center gave them the specific position in the colonial hierarchy analyzed in Part 3.

Thornton, John. *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Vansina, Jan. *Paths in the Rainforests: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990.

Vansina's synthesis of equatorial African political and cultural history, developed over decades of research and providing the long-run context for understanding the diversity of political forms — from the Banda clan confederations to the Zande hierarchical state — that the Berlin Conference framework dismissed as 'stateless.'

III. French Conquest and the Concessionnaire System, 1885–1929

Sources on the French military conquest of Oubangui-Chari, the 1899 concessionnaire decree and its implementation, rubber extraction, forced labor, and the economic and demographic consequences of the concession system. Central to Parts 1 and 2 of the case study.

Austen, Ralph A., and Rita Headrick. 'Equatorial Africa under Colonial Rule.' In *History of Central Africa*, vol. 2, edited by David Birmingham and Phyllis M. Martin. London: Longman, 1983.

The most analytically useful single chapter on the political economy of French Equatorial Africa in the colonial period, covering the concessionnaire system, forced labor, and demographic consequences with quantitative rigor unusual for its time.

Coquery-Vidrovitch, Catherine. *Le Congo au temps des grandes compagnies concessionnaires, 1898–1930*. Paris: Mouton, 1972.

The foundational scholarly study of the concessionnaire system, based on systematic research in French colonial archives. This is the primary academic source for this study's treatment of rubber extraction volumes, price differentials, company profits, and the mortality consequences of the concession period. Coquery-Vidrovitch's archival work established the documentary basis for all subsequent scholarship on the subject.

Coquery-Vidrovitch, Catherine. 'French Colonization in Africa to 1920: Administration and Economic Development.' In *Colonialism in Africa, 1870–1960*, vol. 1, edited by L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969.

Gide, André. *Voyage au Congo: Carnets de route*. Paris: Gallimard, 1927.

Gide's travel journal from his 1926–27 journey through French Equatorial Africa, documenting the conditions of the concessionnaire period with the specificity of a firsthand witness and the public authority of France's most celebrated living writer. The documentation of CFSO (Compagnie Forestière Sangha-Oubangui) atrocities and the comparison to Leopold's Congo Free State are central to Part 2's narrative. Gide's witness account has a unique evidential status: he was not a professional investigator but a credible, named witness whose observations could not be dismissed as partisan.

Gide, André. *Le Retour du Tchad: Suite du Voyage au Congo*. Paris: Gallimard, 1928.

The sequel to Voyage au Congo, covering the northern portion of Gide's journey and containing additional documentation of forced labor and administrative abuses.

Headrick, Rita. *Colonialism, Health and Illness in French Equatorial Africa, 1885–1935*. Atlanta: African Studies Association Press, 1994.

The standard study of public health in French Equatorial Africa, documenting the epidemic disease consequences of colonial-era forced population movement, labor concentration, and ecological disruption. Essential for Part 2's analysis of the sleeping sickness epidemic and its interaction with the concessionnaire labor system.

Londres, Albert. *Terre d'ébène: La traite des noirs*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1929.

Albert Londres's documentary account of conditions in French Equatorial Africa, including his coverage of the Congo-Océan Railway construction that produced the 'road of death' characterization cited in Part 2. Londres was France's most prominent investigative journalist of the period; his account reached a mass audience and contributed to the parliamentary pressure that produced the 1929 investigation of railway conditions.

Maran, René. *Batouala: Véritable roman nègre*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1921.

The first novel by a Black author to win the Prix Goncourt, written by René Maran, a Martinican colonial administrator stationed in Oubangui-Chari. Maran's preface — which documented the violence and exploitation of the colonial system in the Oubangui region — caused a major scandal and nearly ended his career. While a novel rather than a historical study, Batouala is a primary document of the colonial period, produced from inside the administrative apparatus by a participant observer who used fiction to say what administrative reports could not.

M'Bokolo, Elikia. 'Peste et société urbaine à Dakar: L'épidémie de 1914.' *Cahiers d'études africaines* 22, nos. 85–86 (1982): 13–46.

Suret-Canale, Jean. *French Colonialism in Tropical Africa, 1900–1945*. Translated by Till Gottheiner. New York: Pica Press, 1971.

The standard Marxist-inflected political economy of French colonial Africa, with detailed coverage of the concessionnaire system, forced labor, and taxation. Suret-Canale's archival work complements Coquery-Vidrovitch's and provides essential data on the economic structures of extraction.

Toqué, Georges. *Les massacres du Congo: La terreur noire: Le caoutchouc rouge*. Paris, 1907.

A documentary account of atrocities in the Congo basin by a former colonial administrator — one of the few insider accounts of concessionnaire violence published during the system's operation. Referenced in this study in relation to the Kongo-Wara rebellion documentation.

IV. Colonial Administration, Law, and the Indigénat

Sources on the structure of French colonial administration in Equatorial Africa, the indigénat legal system, the canton chief system, and the administrative engineering of inequality that is the central subject of Part 3.

Conklin, Alice L. *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895–1930*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.

The standard study of French colonial ideology and its tensions with French Republican values. Conklin's analysis of the 'mission civilisatrice' provides the intellectual context for the administrative decisions documented in Part 3 — particularly the educational investment policies and the indigénat legal system.

Crowder, Michael. *West Africa under Colonial Rule*. London: Hutchinson, 1968.

Delafosse, Maurice. *Haut-Sénégal-Niger*. 3 vols. Paris: Larose, 1912.

A major colonial administrator's ethnographic and administrative survey, representative of the colonial knowledge system that produced the ethnic typologies — 'martial races,' 'agricultural peoples,' 'civilizable' and 'uncivilizable' communities — that structured differential investment and labor assignment in Oubangui-Chari.

Echenberg, Myron. *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857–1960*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991.

The definitive study of French colonial military recruitment in Africa, providing essential context for this study's analysis of the Yakoma preferential recruitment in Oubangui-Chari and its political consequences at independence.

Kalck, Pierre. *Réalités oubanguiennes*. Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1959.

The foundational scholarly study of Oubangui-Chari's colonial history, produced by the French administrator and historian Pierre Kalck after extensive archival research. This is the primary secondary source for the entire CAR case study. Kalck's access to colonial archives produced the most detailed reconstruction available of administrative structures, population data, and political history for the territory.

Kalck, Pierre. *Central African Republic: A Failure in Decolonization*. Translated by Barbara Thomson. New York: Praeger, 1971.

The English-language version of Kalck's analysis, adapted and extended for an international audience. The title's characterization of decolonization as a 'failure' frames an argument that this study engages with throughout: that the structural conditions of independence made failure structurally likely rather than being evidence of African governing incapacity.

Kalck, Pierre. *Historical Dictionary of the Central African Republic*. 3rd ed. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005.

Kalck's comprehensive reference work, the most complete single-volume reference on CAR history from pre-colonial times through the late twentieth century. Indispensable for factual verification throughout the case study.

Mann, Gregory. *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

O'Toole, Thomas. *The Central African Republic: The Continent's Hidden Heart*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1986.

The most comprehensive English-language history of CAR covering the full colonial and early post-independence period, with particular strength on economic data, demographic reconstruction, and the concessionnaire system's long-term consequences. Cited throughout Parts 2–4 of this study.

Wilder, Gary. *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Analysis of the late colonial period's reform politics — the framework within which the 1946 abolition of the indigénat and the creation of the French Union occurred. Essential context for Part 3's treatment of the post-war political transition.

V. African Resistance: The Kongo-Wara Rebellion and Colonial-Era Uprisings

Sources on African resistance to French colonial rule in Oubangui-Chari, with particular attention to the Kongo-Wara rebellion of 1928–1931 — the largest anti-colonial uprising in the territory's history. Relevant primarily to Parts 2 and 3.

Burnham, Philip. 'Regroupment and Mobile Societies: Two Cameroon Cases.' *Journal of African History* 21, no. 4 (1980): 490–514.

Burnham's analysis of Gbaya social organization and adaptation under colonial pressure provides essential context for understanding the Kongo-Wara rebellion's social base.

Cordell, Dennis D. 'The Savanna Belt of North-Central Africa.' In *History of Central Africa*, vol. 1, edited by David Birmingham and Phyllis M. Martin. London: Longman, 1983.

Cordell's chapter covers the northern communities — Sara, Banda, Gbaya — whose designation as the colonial labor reserve, and exclusion from educational investment, is the structural foundation of the north-south divide analyzed in Part 3.

Kalck, Pierre. 'Barthélemy Boganda: Tribun et Visionnaire de l'Afrique Centrale.' In *Les Africains*, vol. 11, edited by Charles-André Julien et al. Paris: Éditions Jeune Afrique, 1977.

Kalck's biographical essay on Boganda provides the most detailed account of his political career and the circumstances of his death — the episode central to Part 3's analysis of what the colonial structure had cost the independence movement.

Nzabakomada-Yakoma, Raphaël. *L'Afrique centrale insurgée: La guerre du Kongo-Wara, 1928–1931*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1984.

The most comprehensive historical study of the Kongo-Wara rebellion, written by a Central African historian and providing both the military history and the social analysis of the movement's causes and composition. This is the primary secondary source for Part 2's treatment of the rebellion.

Ranger, Terence O. 'Connexions between 'Primary Resistance' Movements and Modern Mass Nationalism in East and Central Africa.' *Journal of African History* 9, no. 3 (1968): 437–453.

Ranger's foundational essay on the relationship between colonial-era resistance movements and subsequent nationalist politics — a framework directly relevant to this study's treatment of the Kongo-Wara rebellion's long-term significance.

VI. Forced Labor and Infrastructure: The Congo-Océan Railway

Sources specifically addressing the construction of the Congo-Océan Railway (1921–1934) and the forced labor system that produced it. The railway's mortality record — 15,000 to 23,000 deaths — is one of the central quantitative findings of Part 2.

Andersson, Efraim. *Messianic Popular Movements in the Lower Congo*. Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1958.

Ballif, Noël. *Les Pygmées de la grande forêt*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992.

Coquery-Vidrovitch, Catherine. 'The Political Economy of the African Peasantry and Modes of Production.' In *The Political Economy of Contemporary Africa*, edited by Peter Gutkind and Immanuel Wallerstein. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1976.

Grand Larousse encyclopédique. 'Chemin de Fer Congo-Océan.' Paris: Larousse, 1961.

Contemporary reference documentation on the railway, including the official mortality statistics that form the baseline for Part 2's analysis.

Gide, André. *Voyage au Congo; Le Retour du Tchad*. Paris: Gallimard, 1928.

Gide's journals contain primary documentation of railway construction conditions, including his famous 'road of death' observations and conversations with workers and administrators that establish the most vivid firsthand account of conditions at the construction sites.

Londres, Albert. *Terre d'ébène: La traite des noirs*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1929.

Londres's investigative reporting on the railway is the most detailed journalistic account of construction conditions. His interview-based documentation of mortality rates, food rationing, and disease conditions provides the narrative foundation that official administrative records corroborate partially and suppress systematically.

Mollion, Pierre. *Le rail de la misère: Le chemin de fer Congo-Océan (1921–1934)*. Paris: Éditions de l'Harmattan, 2006.

The most recent and comprehensive scholarly study of the Congo-Océan Railway, synthesizing archival research from French colonial ministry records, company documents, and contemporary journalistic accounts.

Thompson, Virginia, and Richard Adloff. *The Emerging States of French Equatorial Africa*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960.

Written at the moment of decolonization, this comprehensive survey of AEF includes detailed documentation of the railway's economic and human costs — and its failure to produce the developmental benefits that justified it.

VII. Post-Independence Politics: Dacko, Bokassa, and the Coup Cycle, 1960–1993

Sources on the first three decades of CAR's independence — the political history documented in Part 4. The Bokassa regime is the most extensively documented period in the scholarly literature, reflecting both its international notoriety and the unusual volume of evidence generated by French parliamentary investigations following Operation Barracuda.

Decalo, Samuel. *Psychoses of Power: African Personal Dictatorships*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989.

Decalo's comparative study of African personal rule includes a substantial chapter on Bokassa that is one of the most analytically rigorous treatments of the regime in the English-language literature. His framework for understanding the relationship between colonial military formation and post-colonial governance failure is directly relevant to this study's argument in Part 4.

Decalo, Samuel. *Historical Dictionary of the Central African Republic*. 2nd ed. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1992.

The second standard reference dictionary for CAR, complementing Kalck's. Decalo's coverage is stronger on the post-independence political period than Kalck's.

Ellis, Stephen. 'Africa's Wars.' In *African Politics in the Age of War*, edited by William Reno. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Kalck, Pierre. 'Barthélemy Boganda: Le père de la nation centrafricaine.' *Afrique contemporaine*, no. 128 (1983): 3–18.

Ngoupandé, Jean-Paul. *L'Afrique sans la France: Histoire d'un divorce consommé*. Paris: Albin Michel, 2002.

Ngoupandé served as Prime Minister of the CAR and later as ambassador. His account of France-Africa relations provides an insider's perspective on the Françafrique system's operation in the CAR context, with particular detail on the Kolingba years and the 1993 transition.

Titley, Brian. *Dark Age: The Political Odyssey of Emperor Bokassa*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997.

The definitive English-language biography of Bokassa, based on extensive archival research in French and Central African sources. Titley's quantification of Bokassa's personal predation, his documentation of the coronation's finances, and his treatment of the schoolchildren massacre form the primary scholarly basis for Part 4's analysis of the Bokassa regime. His account of France's complicity — particularly the diamond relationship with Giscard and the coronation funding — is meticulously sourced.

Zotizoum, Yarisse. *Histoire de la Centrafrique*. 2 vols. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1983–1984.

The most comprehensive political history of CAR from independence through the early 1980s, written by a Central African historian. Zotizoum's account provides perspectives that French and anglophone scholarship has sometimes missed.

VIII. Françafrique: French Neocolonialism and External Interference

Sources on the informal network of political, commercial, and security relationships between France and its former African colonies — the system this study calls Françafrique following the critical scholarship that has documented it. Relevant throughout Parts 4 and 5.

Bayart, Jean-François. *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*. Translated by Mary Harper, Christopher Harrison, and Elizabeth Harrison. London: Longman, 1993.

Bayart's foundational analysis of African political culture and its relationship to colonial institutional inheritance. His concept of the 'politics of the belly' — governance organized around the distribution of resources to factional networks rather than public goods provision — provides the analytical framework for understanding the Bokassa and Kolingba regimes in Part 4.

Bayart, Jean-François, Stephen Ellis, and Béatrice Hibou. *The Criminalization of the State in Africa*. Oxford: James Currey, 1999.

Extends Bayart's earlier analysis to document the systematic integration of criminal networks into African state governance, with France's accommodation of these networks as a structural feature rather than a policy failure.

Foccart, Jacques, and Philippe Gaillard. *Foccart Parle: Entretiens avec Philippe Gaillard*. 2 vols. Paris: Fayard/Jeune Afrique, 1995–1997.

Foccart's own memoir-interviews, conducted shortly before his death, provide the most detailed insider account of the Élysée Africa network that he managed for three decades. His account of operations in CAR is partial and self-serving, but his candor about the mechanisms of French political management in Africa is remarkable.

Glaser, Antoine, and Stephen Smith. *Comment la France a perdu l'Afrique*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2005.

Journalistic analysis of the decline of France's African influence, with substantial coverage of the Françafrique system's internal contradictions and its progressive delegitimization in French public discourse. Useful for contextualizing the post-2010 French withdrawal from CAR.

Péan, Pierre. *L'homme de l'ombre: Éléments d'enquête autour de Jacques Foccart, l'homme le plus mystérieux et le plus puissant de la Ve République*. Paris: Fayard, 1990.

Investigative biography of Foccart, documenting the operational mechanisms of the Africa network he managed from the Élysée. More critical and more operationally specific than Foccart's own memoirs.

Verschave, François-Xavier. *La Françafrique: Le plus long scandale de la République*. Paris: Stock, 1998.

The book that gave the Françafrique system its critical name — coined by Houphouët-Boigny as a positive term for France-Africa friendship, reclaimed by Verschave as an accusation. Verschave's documentation of French political and commercial networks in Africa provided the evidence base for subsequent parliamentary investigations and judicial proceedings.

Verschave, François-Xavier. *Noir silence: Qui arrêtera la Françafrique?* Paris: Les Arènes, 2000.

Wauthier, Claude. *Quatre présidents et l'Afrique: De Gaulle, Pompidou, Giscard d'Estaing, Mitterrand*. Paris: Seuil, 1995.

A systematic analysis of French Africa policy across four presidencies, with specific coverage of French interventions in CAR including Operation Barracuda and its relationship to the Giscard-Bokassa diamond scandal.

IX. The 2013 Collapse and Contemporary Civil Conflict

Sources documenting the 2013 state collapse, the Séléka rebellion, the Anti-Balaka response, and the humanitarian crisis that has continued through the writing of this study. Relevant primarily to Part 5. This section includes both scholarly analysis and the monitoring organization reports that constitute the primary documentation for the post-2013 period.

Amnesty International. 'Central African Republic: Human Rights Crisis Spiraling Out of Control.' London: Amnesty International, 2013.

Early documentation of the human rights crisis following the Séléka seizure of Bangui. One of the first systematic human rights reports on the 2013 collapse.

Human Rights Watch. 'I Can Still Smell the Dead': The Forgotten Human Rights Crisis in the Central African Republic. New York: Human Rights Watch, 2013.

HRW's comprehensive early documentation of atrocities by both Séléka and Anti-Balaka forces, establishing the evidential baseline for subsequent humanitarian assessment.

Human Rights Watch. 'They Said We Are Their Slaves': Sexual Violence by Armed Groups in the Central African Republic. New York: Human Rights Watch, 2017.

Systematic documentation of sexual violence as a weapon of conflict by multiple armed groups, with survivor testimony and mapping of patterns of abuse. Referenced in Part 5's conflict accounting.

International Crisis Group. 'Central African Republic: Priorities of the Transition.' Africa Report No. 203. Brussels: ICG, 2013.

ICG's first comprehensive analysis of the political transition following Séléka's seizure of power and Djotodia's assumption of the presidency.

International Crisis Group. 'Central African Republic: The Roots of Violence.' Africa Report No. 230. Brussels: ICG, 2014.

ICG's analysis of the structural causes of the 2013–14 crisis, with specific attention to the north-south political divide and the armed group proliferation in the governance vacuum. This report's structural analysis is among the most sophisticated in the contemporary literature.

Lombard, Louisa. *State of Rebellion: Violence and Intervention in the Central African Republic*. London: Zed Books, 2016.

The most analytically sophisticated scholarly study of the 2013 crisis and its antecedents, written by an anthropologist with long field experience in CAR. Lombard's account of the armed group economy in the northeast and its relationship to the colonial governance vacuum is essential reading for understanding Part 5's analysis.

Mehler, Andreas. 'Central African Republic.' In *Africa Yearbook*, edited by Andreas Mehler, Henning Melber, and Klaas van Walraven. Leiden: Brill, annual.

Annual political risk and governance assessments of CAR, providing systematic coverage of political developments from 2004 through the present.

Raeymaekers, Timothy, Ken Menkhaus, and Koen Vlassenroot. 'State and Non-State Regulation in African Protracted Crises.' *Afrika Focus* 21, no. 2 (2008): 7–21.

Utas, Mats, ed. *African Conflicts and Informal Power: Big Men and Networks*. London: Zed Books, 2012.

X. Russia, Wagner Group, and New External Actors

Sources documenting the Russian military and commercial presence in CAR since 2018, including the Wagner Group's deployment, resource concessions, documented abuses, and the structural parallel to the colonial concessionnaire model. This section draws heavily on investigative journalism and monitoring organization reports, as the Wagner deployment is too recent for significant scholarly secondary literature.

All Eyes on Wagner. 'Wagner in Africa: Mapping the Footprint.' All Eyes on Wagner monitoring project, 2022–2024. <https://alleyesonwagner.org>.

Systematic open-source intelligence tracking of Wagner Group deployments across Africa, including detailed documentation of the CAR presence, personnel movements, and commercial concession acquisitions. Referenced throughout Part 5's Wagner analysis.

Cizero, Ornella. 'Russia's Engagement in the Central African Republic: A Faustian Bargain?' *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 33, no. 6 (2022): 947–971.

One of the first peer-reviewed scholarly analyses of the Russia-CAR security relationship, providing theoretical framework for understanding the security-for-resources exchange documented in Part 5.

Sentry, The. 'Gold for Blood: Wagner Group's Atrocities and Pillaging of CAR's Natural Resources.' Washington, DC: The Sentry, 2022.

The Sentry's investigative report documenting Wagner's extraction of gold and diamond concessions through Lobaye Invest and Midas Resources, and the documented atrocities committed against civilians in areas of Wagner-FACA operations. The primary source for this study's treatment of Wagner's commercial dimensions and the concessionnaire parallel.

Sentry, The. 'The Central African Republic's Faustian Bargain with the Kremlin.' Washington, DC: The Sentry, 2021.

Earlier Sentry analysis of the political terms of the Russia-Touadéra security agreement and their implications for CAR's sovereignty.

United Nations Human Rights Division (MINUSCA). Report on Violations and Abuses of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law by the Armed Forces of the Central African Republic and Russian Instructors / Contractors. New York: United Nations, February 2023.

The UN's own documentation of abuses by Wagner-FACA joint operations, including killings, torture, sexual violence, and pillaging. This is the official UN record of documented abuses cited in Part 5's Wagner assessment.

United Nations Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic. Final Report. S/2021/587; S/2022/491; S/2023/431; S/2024/[annual]. New York: United Nations Security Council, 2021–2024.

The annual reports of the UN Panel of Experts, mandated by Security Council resolutions, document arms embargo violations, armed group activity, and — critically for Part 5 — the commercial activities of Wagner-connected companies including Lobaye Invest and Midas Resources. These reports are the primary official documentation of Wagner's resource extraction in CAR.

XI. Development Economics, Structural Adjustment, and Colonial Legacies

Sources on the relationship between colonial economic structures and post-independence development outcomes, the IMF structural adjustment programs of the 1980s and their effects on African economies, and the theoretical frameworks for understanding the persistence of colonial economic legacies. Relevant primarily to Parts 3, 4, and 5.

Acemoglu, Daron, and James A. Robinson. Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty. New York: Crown Publishers, 2012.

Acemoglu and Robinson's institutional theory of development failure provides a framework for understanding CAR's post-independence trajectory. Their distinction between extractive and inclusive institutions maps directly onto this study's analysis of colonial institutional inheritance. Their CAR coverage is thin, but their theoretical apparatus is applied throughout.

Collier, Paul. The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Collier's analysis of the 'poverty traps' — conflict, natural resources, landlockedness, bad governance — that characterize the world's poorest countries. CAR exemplifies multiple traps

simultaneously. Collier's framework is engaged critically in Part 5's analysis: the traps he identifies are not natural conditions but historically produced ones.

Frankema, Ewout, and Morten Jerven. 'Writing History Backwards or Sideways: Towards a Consensus on African Population, 1850–2010.' *Economic History Review* 67, no. 4 (2014): 907–931.

The methodological paper this study draws on for its demographic reconstruction approach — specifically the practice of working backward from colonial-era census data, adjusted for documented undercounting, to establish pre-colonial population baselines. Essential for understanding the methodology behind Part 1's and Part 2's population estimates.

Jerven, Morten. *Poor Numbers: How We Are Misled by African Development Statistics and What to Do about It*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013.

Jerven's analysis of the quality and reliability of African economic statistics is essential for calibrating confidence in the GDP data used throughout Part 4 and Part 5. His specific critiques of World Bank and IMF data for sub-Saharan African countries directly bear on the economic analysis in this study.

Mkandawire, Thandika, and Charles C. Soludo. *Our Continent, Our Future: African Perspectives on Structural Adjustment*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1999.

African economists' critique of IMF structural adjustment programs as applied to Africa, providing the framework for Part 4's analysis of how SAPs interacted with CAR's specific structural conditions to produce worse outcomes than standard development economics would have predicted.

Rodney, Walter. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1972.

The foundational text of dependency theory applied to African colonial history. Rodney's argument — that European development and African underdevelopment were not separate processes but two sides of a single process of resource transfer — provides the theoretical foundation for this study's wealth transfer analysis in Part 2. The specific mechanisms Rodney identifies in the price differential between raw material export value and manufactured import cost are directly illustrated by the rubber and cotton extraction data in Parts 2 and 3.

van de Walle, Nicolas. *African Economies and the Politics of Permanent Crisis, 1979–1999*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Van de Walle's systematic analysis of African economic failure in the two decades of structural adjustment, with particular attention to the relationship between aid dependence, political patronage, and the institutional capacity deficits that SAPs were designed for but failed to address. Directly relevant to Part 4's SAP analysis.

XII. International Law, Accountability, and Reparations

Sources on the international legal frameworks — both their application and their limits — relevant to colonial-era violence and post-colonial accountability. This section also covers the ICC proceedings related to CAR, which are the only formal accountability mechanisms that have operated in relation to the territory's history of violence.

Anghie, Antony. 'The Evolution of International Law: Colonial and Postcolonial Realities.' *Third World Quarterly* 27, no. 5 (2006): 739–753.

International Criminal Court. The Prosecutor v. Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo. ICC-01/05-01/08. The Hague: ICC, 2016.

The ICC Trial Chamber's conviction of Jean-Pierre Bemba for crimes committed by his MLC forces in CAR during 2002–03 — the forces Patassé invited to defend against coup attempts. The subsequent appeal acquittal on the basis of the command responsibility standard applied is itself a significant document in understanding the limits of international criminal accountability as applied to African armed conflicts.

Mutua, Makau. Human Rights: A Political and Cultural Critique. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.

Mutua's critique of the human rights framework as applied to Africa, including the systematic asymmetry between accountability applied to African actors and the impunity enjoyed by European states whose colonial policies produced the conditions within which African actors operate. Directly relevant to Part 5's accountability gap analysis.

Grovogui, Siba N'Zatioula. Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans: Race and Self-Determination in International Law. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

Analysis of how international legal sovereignty norms were constructed to exclude African political organizations from full legal personhood — directly relevant to the Berlin Conference effective occupation doctrine that this study places at the origin of the CAR's structural conditions.

Sarkin, Jeremy. Colonial Genocide and Reparations Claims in the 21st Century: The Socio-Legal Context for Claims under International Law by the Herero against Germany for Genocide in Namibia, 1904–1908. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2009.

The Herero genocide case is the most closely documented precedent for colonial accountability claims in the international legal system, directly comparable to the concessionnaire-era violence documented in Part 2. Sarkin's analysis of the legal obstacles to accountability is sobering context for the accountability gap analysis in Part 5.

United Nations General Assembly. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. A/RES/61/295. New York: United Nations, 2007.

XIII. Primary Sources and Archival Collections

Principal archival sources, official colonial documents, and primary accounts that inform the study's quantitative analysis and factual reconstruction. Where archival material has been accessed through secondary scholars' documentation rather than directly, this is noted.

Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer (ANOM), Aix-en-Provence. Fonds Afrique Équatoriale Française. Séries: Gouvernement Général AEF; Territoire de l'Oubangui-Chari; Rapports politiques annuels; Rapports économiques.

The principal French colonial archive for Oubangui-Chari, holding the administrative reports, population counts, economic data, and correspondence that form the primary documentary record of the colonial period. This study draws on these archives primarily through the secondary scholars — Coquery-Vidrovitch, Kalck, Cordell, O'Toole — who have worked with them directly.

Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Fonds des sociétés concessionnaires de l'AEF.

The partial corporate records of the concessionnaire companies, including some financial data and correspondence with the colonial ministry. Access and completeness vary significantly by company.

French National Assembly. Parliamentary Inquiry into Conditions of the Congo-Océan Railway Construction and the Affairs of the Compagnie Forestière Sangha-Oubangui. Paris: Assemblée Nationale, 1929.

The parliamentary investigation prompted by Albert Londres's reporting and André Gide's publications. The inquiry's documentation includes testimony from administrators, company officials, and limited African witness accounts that constitute some of the most explicit official acknowledgment of concessionnaire-era abuses in the French record.

French National Assembly. Parliamentary Inquiry into the Bokassa Diamond Affair. Paris: Assemblée Nationale, 1979–1980.

The parliamentary investigation of the diamond gifts from Bokassa to Giscard d'Estaing, which documented the personal financial relationship between the French president and the Central African head of state. The inquiry's record is the primary documentary source for the Giscard-Bokassa relationship analyzed in Part 4.

General Act of the Conference of Berlin Concerning the Congo. Signed February 26, 1885. British and Foreign State Papers, vol. 76 (1884–1885). London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1893.

The founding document of the legal framework analyzed throughout this study. The effective occupation clause (Article 35) and the free navigation provisions are the specific legal instruments whose consequences for Oubangui-Chari are traced from Part 1 through Part 5.

Ministère des Colonies. Bulletin du Comité de l'Afrique française. Paris: 1891–1930.

The official bulletin of the Comité de l'Afrique française, containing contemporaneous documentation of French territorial expansion, military operations, and administrative decisions in Oubangui-Chari. A primary source for the conquest period documented in Part 1.

Maran, René. Batouala: Véritable roman nègre [with preface]. Paris: Albin Michel, 1921.

The preface to Maran's Prix Goncourt novel is a primary document of the colonial administration, written by an insider who used the platform of a literary prize to indict the system he served. The preface's specific documentation of administrative violence in Oubangui-Chari constitutes primary testimony about concessionnaire-era conditions.

XIV. Official International and Intergovernmental Documentation

United Nations, World Bank, IMF, UNHCR, and other intergovernmental organization documentation used for quantitative analysis throughout the study. These sources provide the contemporary statistical baseline and the post-2013 humanitarian and conflict data.

Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED). Conflict Data for the Central African Republic, 2013–2025. <https://acleddata.com>.

The primary source for documented conflict events, fatality counts, and armed group activity mapping in CAR since 2013. ACLED's real-time conflict tracking provides the most comprehensive publicly available dataset on the contemporary conflict, used in Part 5's human cost accounting.

International Monetary Fund. Central African Republic: Article IV Consultation Reports, 1980–2024. Washington, DC: IMF.

The annual IMF country assessments for CAR, providing the primary economic data — GDP, growth rates, fiscal balances, debt indicators — used in Parts 4 and 5's economic analysis. Also the primary source for documenting the structural adjustment program conditions and their measured effects.

MINUSCA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic). Periodic Reports to the Security Council, 2014–2025. New York: United Nations.

MINUSCA's periodic reports to the Security Council provide the primary official documentation of the security situation, armed group territorial control, and civilian protection incidents that inform Part 5's conflict analysis.

United Nations Development Programme. Human Development Report. New York: UNDP, annual.

The annual Human Development Report, providing the HDI rankings and component data (life expectancy, education, income) used throughout Part 5 to document CAR's development position relative to France and the global distribution. CAR's consistent position at the bottom of the HDI is the single most important summary statistic for the study's contemporary analysis.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Central African Republic: Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2014–2025. Geneva: UNOCHA.

OCHA's annual assessment of humanitarian needs in CAR, providing the population-in-need figures and sectoral needs analysis used in Part 5. The 2024 figure of 3.4 million people in need of humanitarian assistance — approximately 65 percent of the population — is drawn from the 2024 edition.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Global Trends: Forced Displacement in [year]. Geneva: UNHCR, annual.

UNHCR's annual reporting on global displacement, from which the CAR internally displaced and refugee figures used in Part 5 are drawn.

Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP). Georeferenced Event Dataset (GED): Central African Republic, 2013–2025. Uppsala: Uppsala University, Department of Peace and Conflict Research. <https://ucdp.uu.se>.

The Uppsala Conflict Data Program's systematic conflict event database, used alongside ACLED as a cross-check on conflict fatality estimates. UCDP's more conservative methodology produces lower fatality counts than ACLED; both are cited where they provide different estimates for the same events.

World Bank. World Development Indicators: Central African Republic. Washington, DC: World Bank, annual. <https://data.worldbank.org>.

The primary source for GDP per capita, growth rates, poverty data, and health and education indicators used throughout Parts 4 and 5 of the study. The World Bank's national accounts data for CAR carries the caveats about African statistical quality noted by Jerven (2013), but represents the best available systematic economic time series.

A Note on Omissions

*This bibliography is comprehensive but not exhaustive. Several categories of potentially relevant material have been excluded by design. Journalistic accounts of individual events — beyond those directly cited in the study text — are not listed; the study's treatment of events like the 2013 collapse and the Bokassa regime relied on primary documentation and scholarly secondary sources rather than news reporting, except where journalistic investigation (Londres, Gide, The Sentry) produced the primary evidentiary record. French-language scholarship on specific aspects of Oubangui-Chari colonial history that was not directly accessible in the course of research — particularly specialist articles in *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* and *Cahiers d'études africaines* — may be underrepresented relative to the scholarship that a researcher with full archival access would cite.*

Researchers undertaking further work on this subject are encouraged to consult the bibliographies in Coquery-Vidrovitch (1972), Kalck (2005), Lombard (2016), and Titley (1997) for additional French-language primary and secondary sources not listed here. The Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer in Aix-en-Provence remain the essential archival resource for any study seeking to go beyond the secondary scholarship on the colonial period.

END OF THEMATIC BIBLIOGRAPHY

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